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Understanding Indigenous and non-Indigenous Perspectives of Reconciliation: A Case Study

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Education

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Abstract

Reconciliation in the Canadian context is difficult to define (Graeme & Mandawe, 2017; Martin, 2009), but is often linked to the residential school system (Chrisjohn & Wasacase, 2011; Nagy, 2012). This instrumental case study examines how reconciliation is understood and activated among a group of educators and community members involved with a professional learning event held in Southern Ontario inspired by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Employing narrative inquiry, and informed by decolonizing methodologies, seven event organizers, four presenters, and five attendees participated in conversational interviews. Two main themes were uncovered from the interview data. The first, reconciliation is difficult, includes consideration of the personal discomfort involved with reconciliation efforts; the tensions that can arise from bringing together Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, as evidenced in a specific incident which occurred at the event; and the institutionalization of colonialism. The second theme associated with the need for action to support reconciliation is connected to education in the following ways: making learning mandatory, being sensitive to language, and centring Indigenous voices. Action for reconciliation through relationships is tied to community connections and having care for people. Informed by critical and decolonizing theoretical perspectives, the author discusses three elements associated with the challenges to describing and actualizing reconciliation: the systemic manifestations of colonialism including Canada's long history of oppression, the impacts of the *Indian Act*, and the ways that colonialism informs social institutions that exist today; the role of individuals in maintaining settler colonialism; and the tendency to use reconciliation as a synonym for other Indigenous-

centred activities, such as resurgence and restitution. Based on the interview data and related literature, this study posits that the question “what does reconciliation mean” is less important than the efforts of working towards what reconciliation could be, and, ultimately, reconciliation is a complicated concept that requires context-specific consideration.

Keywords: reconciliation; education; settler colonialism; narrative inquiry; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

Lay Summary

Reconciliation in the Canadian context is difficult to define (Graeme & Mandawe, 2017; Martin, 2009), but is often linked to the residential school system (Chrisjohn & Wasacase, 2011; Nagy, 2012). This dissertation examines how reconciliation is understood and activated among a group of educators and community members involved with a professional learning event held in Southern Ontario inspired by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Employing narrative and decolonizing methodologies, seven event organizers, four presenters, and five attendees participated in conversational interviews. Two main themes were uncovered from the interview data. The first, reconciliation is difficult, includes consideration of the personal discomfort involved with reconciliation efforts; the tensions that can arise from bringing together Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, as evidenced in a specific incident which occurred at the event; and the institutionalization of colonialism. The second theme associated with the need for action to support reconciliation is connected to education in the following ways: making learning mandatory, being sensitive to language, and centring Indigenous voices. Action for reconciliation through relationships is tied to community connections and having care for people. Informed by critical and decolonizing theoretical perspectives, the author discusses three elements associated with the challenges to describing and actualizing reconciliation: the systemic manifestations of colonialism including Canada's long history of oppression, the impacts of the *Indian Act*, and the ways that colonialism informs social institutions that exist today; the role of individuals in maintaining settler colonialism; and the tendency to use reconciliation as a synonym for other Indigenous-centred activities, such as resurgence and restitution.

Based on the interview data and related literature, this study posits that the question “what does reconciliation mean” is less important than the efforts of working towards what reconciliation could be, and, ultimately, reconciliation is a complicated concept that requires context-specific consideration.

Acknowledgments

When I entered university over a decade ago as a first-generation post-secondary student, I never anticipated that it would lead to all of this. To my supervisor, Dr. Brent Debassige, thank you for your incredible guidance throughout this doctoral journey. Whether I had scheduled a meeting or popped into your office, I always left our conversations with a sense of purpose and excitement. I continue to be humbled by the depth of thought you put into your feedback on this writing and in our many conversations. To my committee member, Dr. Pauline Wakeham, I am grateful for your feedback on my work and the strength your expertise has brought to this project. For the participants who shared their feelings, ideas, concerns, and experiences, I am so grateful that I got to spend time with all of you. I have grown as a researcher, educator, community member, and person through the knowledge you shared with me.

For my peers and colleagues, especially those who started their doctoral journey with me in the Critical Policy, Equity, and Leadership Studies cohort in 2014, I am so grateful for all the growth we experienced together and the friendships we developed. Jenna, I do not think I would have made it through this without you. The text messages, phone calls, and emails back and forth about everything from word placement in a sentence, to working together on projects, and gossiping about life was an integral part of this process. I hope you have enjoyed our conversations as much as I have.

Over the last few years I have enjoyed teaching in the Faculty of Education at Western University, and I am grateful to all the instructors I worked with. Amber, thank you for sharing your resources and knowledge. Brent and Erica, thank you for your coordination of the course. To the others who have been a part of the course, thank you. I

have grown as an educator in my content knowledge and pedagogy as a result of working with all of you. Julie, thank you for offering me a place to stay while attending classes and teaching in the years after.

Natalie, a teaching colleague, research collaborator, and friend: I am so grateful for everything we have accomplished together. Our critical friendship has truly been much more than a professional relationship. Thank you for sharing your guidance as a fellow PhD student, researcher, and mother.

To my family, thank you for supporting me in my seemingly never ending post-secondary education adventure. Mike, you have never questioned why I do what I do and have supported me blindly when you did not know where this might lead us. You have taken an interest in my work and your “help” over the years has been much appreciated. Dad and Lisa, thank you for encouraging me to keep going. To my girls, Everly and Kinsley, thank you for joining me on this journey. Becoming a new mother while completing my doctorate has taught me about the power of commitment, hard work, family, and strong coffee.

I am grateful to have received funding support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and the Ontario Graduate Scholarship.

I have come to realize that anyone and everything can be a teacher: my students, my family, friends and colleagues, a difficult circumstance, the weather. Thank you to all of those who have been my “teachers.”

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Prologue

I use this prologue to share who I am and how I come to this research. Along with the practice of Indigenous scholars, I situate myself because “self-location anchors knowledge within experiences, and these experiences greatly influence interpretations” (Kovach, 2009, p. 111), and as Cree scholar and writer Shawn Wilson (2008) states, “we cannot remove ourselves from our world in order to examine it” (p. 14). I hope that the information that follows will help you, as the reader, to make sense of my research story and the stories that follow.

Recognizing that qualitative research is inherently subjective (Kovach, 2009; Patton, 2002) and respecting the decolonizing approach to research that I have embraced, I begin with who I am and where I am from. My name is Kaitlyn Watson. I am a daughter, sister, aunt, cousin, partner, and mother. I am the eldest of three children among my full siblings, and in the middle among my larger family that includes older half siblings. My mother died when I was nine and my father never remarried. During my doctoral journey, I took custody of my infant niece and gave birth to a baby girl. I have always resided in Ontario, Canada and spent most of my life living in Southern Ontario. My ancestors come from different parts of Europe including England, Scotland, Poland, and Hungary.

Growing up as the eldest in my home, and without a mother, I took on parental responsibilities quite early in my life. I protected my siblings at school, comforted them when they were sad or frustrated, and at a young age took on a gendered division of household labour, such as laundry and cleaning. My brother struggled in school for various reasons and stopped attending when he was fourteen years old, and, as a

caregiver-sibling, I felt some responsibility for this outcome. When it was time to select a university program at the end of high school, teaching was the profession that felt right. I always enjoyed working with youth and enjoyed school myself; I wanted other young people to have the same affection for learning. I remember imagining that by becoming a teacher I could “save all the children,” and that deed would allow me to make amends to my brother for the experiences he had in school. I attended Lakehead University in Orillia, Ontario and began my journey of becoming an elementary school teacher.

Through my undergraduate learning at an institution with an emphasis on Indigenous student learning and promoting learning about Indigenous perspectives, I learned about contemporary Indigenous peoples. Throughout my elementary and secondary education, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples were presented in an ahistoric manner. My formative years in schooling fostered an erasure of Indigenous peoples and their perspectives. I do not recall ever being prompted by teachers to think of Indigenous peoples’ contemporary existence despite having family friends from Georgina Island First Nation and living fifteen minutes from the Mississaugas of Scugog Island. After taking the “Aboriginal Education” course required in my concurrent education program, I applied to a position in an education program at the Toronto Zoo focused on bringing together Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge with Western Science. In this position, I gained awareness of Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee peoples, their beliefs, cultural practices, and teachings; I worked with reserve communities; and for the first time, I interacted with a community of people I had never consciously interacted with before. Following my first summer with the program, I attended Teacher’s College

at Lakehead University's Thunder Bay campus to become a secondary school teacher after deciding to change streams.

Being in Thunder Bay was an eye-opening experience. Growing up in rural Ontario, I was in classrooms and communities that reflected what I consider to be my generic Eurocentric cultural background, whereas Thunder Bay has a mix of various, but strong, European influences and First Nations cultures. In parts of the city, I saw poverty that I had never seen before. I volunteered at Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School with First Nations students who had to move to the city to complete their schooling. I met future teachers in my program who aspired to go back and support education in their remote First Nations communities.

Following the completion of my Bachelor of Education degree, I returned to Turtle Island Conservation for the summer. I continued to deepen my understanding of Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee cultures. I more intensely reflected on the need for non-Indigenous peoples to overcome their stereotypical learning and unsettle the expressed forms of racism that occurred at the expense of Indigenous peoples. The need for change in public education was becoming increasingly obvious to me.

I continued my learning at Trent University in their Canadian Studies and Indigenous Studies Master of Arts program. It was at this time that I became more conscious of the settler narrative of the "Indian problem," which is propagated instead of the more accurate "settler problem" (Epp, 2008). I understand the settler problem to be the settler preoccupation with fixing the Indigenous Other, which is based upon misconceptions and is used to avoid confronting settler colonialism. Up until this point, I had naively thought that anything non-Indigenous peoples were doing to "help"

Indigenous peoples was a good thing – I too, despite having some awareness of Indigenous issues, had bought into the “Indian problem.” I had not yet realized the complicated nuances of settler complicity.

In concert with my course work, I also used my time at Trent University to further my learning about Indigenous cultures and knowledges – particularly of Anishinaabe peoples. Being on the traditional territory of the Anishinabek, and with a longstanding relationship with Curve Lake First Nation, Trent University operates a robust Indigenous cultural centre called First Peoples House of Learning which offers workshops, teachings, and conferences including its annual Elders Gathering. I continue to attend these events when I can.

Much formal and informal learning occurred while I completed my master’s degree and I recall one incident serving as a catalyst for my pursuit of a doctorate in the Faculty of Education at Western University. I recall this story as best as I can, while acknowledging that human memory is notably unreliable, and I can only describe how I perceived the situation. While explaining to a small segment of my cohort my interest in developing my master’s research about an on-reserve school I had attended during my summer work with Turtle Island Conservation, I was faced with some pointed questions: why do you want to do this research? How are you connected to the community? I tried to explain how I felt connected to the community through my role as a teacher, how I became interested in education, and my desire to better understand the community’s education program. But, again, I was asked why I should be working with this community. Had they invited me to work with them? I remember breaking down in tears so confused and overwhelmed by their concern for me. Instead of bringing my questions

to my supervisor about what constitutes appropriate research, I hid away and avoided the situation.

I now have a deeper appreciation for the importance of these questions, and I identify with the significant learning that I developed in my interpretation of their perspectives. After completing my master's thesis about education policy, I pursued my doctorate with questions: what is my place as a non-Indigenous person in Canada? In research? In society?

As I write today, I am interested in the framework of reconciliation for understanding the relationship between Indigenous and settler peoples. I continue to consider my relationship to the Indigenous communities around me, my relationship to land, and my responsibilities as a treaty person on Williams Treaty territory. After much consideration, when asked about my heritage, I now self-identify as a Euro-Canadian settler, but I am also a student, a teacher, and a researcher. At times one of these identities is more forward in my consciousness than the others. However, I work to acknowledge their presence in my everyday interactions, including how I approach research.

Chapter One: Introduction

Colonialism in Canada is expansive and well documented (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996a; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015a, 2015b, 2015d). The final report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) released in 1996 called for a renewed relationship between Aboriginal¹ and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada. The framing recommendation from RCAP (1996d) states *“a renewed relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada [should] be established on the basis of justice and fairness”* (p. 1, emphasis in original). However, this goal was never actualized when the government shelved the document and subsequently failed to act on most of the recommendations (Turner, 2013). Since then, attention has focused on the urgency of decolonization, redress, and reconciliation in Canada by events such as Idle No More protests in 2012 and 2013, the release of findings from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) in 2015, the federal government’s inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls which concluded in 2019, ongoing efforts to implement the United Nations Declarations on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP; United Nations General Assembly, 2007), and calls for an apology and inquiry into the Sixties Scoop and those left out of the residential school apology in 2008.

With the possibility of a change in government at the federal level in 2015, concern for Indigenous-settler relations generated more attention in Canadian politics. In

¹ I use the terms Indigenous and Aboriginal interchangeably throughout this dissertation based on the language used in the source I am referring to. I also interchange the terms non-Indigenous, non-Aboriginal, and settler to identify people who do not identify as any of the First Peoples in Canada. Please see more about terminology at the end of this chapter.

a mandate letter written by the newly elected Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, the Prime Minister asserted his dedication to “a renewed, nation-to-nation relationship with Indigenous peoples, based on recognition of rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership” (Trudeau, 2015, para. 7). Trudeau (2015) also stated that the implementation of recommendations from the TRC, starting with full implementation of the UNDRIP was a top priority for the new government. However, former Justice Minister Jody Wilson-Raybould,² from the We Wai Kai nation, at a meeting of the Assembly of First Nations in July 2016 commented that “simplistic approaches, such as adopting the UNDRIP as being Canadian law are unworkable and, respectfully, a political distraction to undertaking the hard work required to actually implement it” (Wilson-Raybould, 2016, p. 9). Then, in 2019, the Liberal Party supported a New Democratic Party private member’s bill to implement the UNDRIP, which failed to pass in the Senate. This ebb and flow occurring within Canada’s parliamentary system suggests that tensions and complications continue to exist, and the future of reconciliation remains obscure.

Reconciliation in Canada

Before contact with Europeans, traditional ways of learning among Indigenous peoples were holistic and ensured the survival of knowledges, cultures, and languages (Kirkness, 1999; Neeganagwedgin, 2013). Early relationships between European explorers or traders and Aboriginal communities were generally characterized by peace, friendship, and alliance (Borrows, 1997) where “Europeans had to fit themselves into a

² Wilson-Raybould was elected as an independent in the 2019 election following her removal from the Liberal party in 2019.

pre-existing Aboriginal trading system” (Miller, 2009, p. 32). However, this notion is contested among some Indigenous peoples. For example, Chrisjohn and Wasacase (2009) state that “reconciliation ... is an attempt to insinuate a revised and bogus history ... [and] implies that, once upon a time, Indigenous peoples and settlers lived in peace and harmony” (p. 199). The TRC (2015d) also recognizes this in their final report in which they acknowledge that for some Aboriginal peoples, the relationship has never been “conciliatory” (p. 6).

As colonization quickly expanded, European settlers imposed their ideologies onto Indigenous communities and used education as a tool of assimilation, most obviously through the Indian residential school system (IRS) (Milloy, 1999). The IRS system existed from the 1830s to the late 1990s involving 150 000 Indigenous children in Canada (TRC, 2015a). First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students were exposed to European illnesses (Milloy, 1999; TRC, 2015a, 2015d); starvation and nutritional experiments (Mosby, 2013); sexual, physical, emotional, and spiritual abuse (TRC, 2015a, 2015d); and an overall lack of care (Milloy, 1999). Furthermore, the TRC (2015d) asserts that the government’s goal of assimilation, of which the residential school system was one tool, was nothing less than “cultural genocide” (p. 1).

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

The TRC was formally established in 2008 by the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement to engage in several tasks that included a truth telling and reconciliation process, a report on the IRS system, and recommendations to the government (Regan, 2010). The commission collected millions of documents and heard testimony from thousands of witnesses including residential school survivors, their

family members, and staff from the schools. Across six volumes, the final report provides a detailed historical account of policy decisions, lived experiences at the schools, the legacy of the system, and the possibility of reconciliation.

Not only did the TRC hold National Events, with \$20 million allocated for commemoration initiatives through the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, but the TRC was also an inspiration for communities to commence their own projects for reconciliation. Furthermore, the TRC (2015b) proposed action through their 94 Calls to Action with the purpose to “redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation” (p. 277). Chair of the TRC, and now a Canadian Senator, Murray Sinclair wrote that the Calls “should not be viewed as a national penance, but as a second chance at establishing a relationship of equals” and the final report, “not the close but the beginning of a journey towards a more just, fairer, and more courageous country” (TRC, 2015a, p. vii).

Research Problem

While political discourse might be changing with regards to Indigenous-settler relations, this does not equate to a change in action. There remains a historically informed and deeply stressed relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada rooted in colonial efforts of assimilation and genocide. This relationship necessitates critically informed attention of settler society to ensure that such tensions are addressed using approaches that centre the rights and goals of Indigenous communities. As a settler Canadian, I believe it is my responsibility to live up to the expectations outlined in the various treaty agreements of which I am a part (e.g., Williams Treaty, Guswentha/Two Row Wampum). Furthermore, given that I live in a time when

governments around the world are increasingly using the rhetoric of apology and reconciliation (Cornthassel & Holder, 2008; Wakeham, 2012), I must consider the complexity of reconciliatory projects that I myself observe or engage in. Thus, my research focuses on investigating a TRC-inspired event³ which I attended. To protect the anonymity of the participants in this study, I have not named the event which served as the basis for this research, but I will provide some contextual description.

Like other localized TRC activities, this event intended to increase awareness of the residential school legacy among educators⁴ and community members in Southern Ontario. The organizing committee included Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples from the local area and consisted of teachers, students, researchers, residential school survivors, administrators, cultural advisors, and people from faith communities. The program included a traditional opening, workshops, a keynote speaker, and perhaps most like the TRC National Events, time dedicated to listening to residential school survivors speak about their experiences. It is also important to note that this event took place before the TRC concluded its work, which included the release of its final report and the Calls to Action. While this event is not representative of the TRC's work, or of other community-driven efforts inspired by the TRC, it does provide an example of how individuals and communities have taken up action in the spirit of reconciliation.

³ I interchangeably use the phrases TRC-inspired event and professional learning event to refer to the same event which is the focus of this study.

⁴ I have used the word educator in this dissertation to include anyone who informs others. This does not solely describe the work of teachers, but in this context, extends to community activists, public speakers, researchers, etcetera.

The purpose of this research is to investigate how Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators retrospectively understand and make meaning of reconciliation after organizing and/or participating in a truth and reconciliation event at a local level. In addition, this research inquires about the ways those educators have used what they learned from the event in their personal and professional lives. Finally, echoing the sentiment of Epp (2008), I am interested in examining the position of the settler, where “the subject under closest scrutiny becomes ‘ourselves.’ In other words, the subject is not the ‘Indian problem’ but the ‘settler problem’” (p. 126). Therefore, I have pursued a project that resists a deficit perspective of Indigenous peoples which is commonly perpetuated in Canada to uphold settler dominance.

This research focuses on an event aimed at implementing the work of truth and reconciliation on a local level. I employ methods that allow for the representation of multiple perspectives and experiences including those from the organizing committee, presenters, and attendees (including myself as an attendee), from Indigenous and non-Indigenous backgrounds. These aims have led me to consider the following research questions:

1. How do Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators retrospectively understand and make meaning of reconciliation after their involvement with organizing and/or participating in a truth and reconciliation event at a local level?
2. How are Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators using what they learned, from organizing and/or participating in a truth and reconciliation event, in their personal and professional lives?

3. How do I make meaning of reconciliation and what are my roles and responsibilities as a settler Canadian in reconciliatory activities with Indigenous peoples?

Purpose and Significance

Prior to the TRC's work, Environics Research Group (2008), on behalf of Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada and the TRC, conducted a baseline study to identify how much Canadians knew about Indigenous peoples. Based on a regionally stratified telephone survey with 1,503 Canadians, and interviews with people who identified as Indigenous, non-Indigenous, and new immigrants, they found that "Canadians in general are somewhat, though not strongly, familiar with current Aboriginal issues in Canada" (p. i). According to the follow up report from Environics Institute for Survey Research (2016), since the beginning of the TRC's work in 2008, there is growing awareness among Canadians and further appreciation of Indigenous history through increased information sharing in formal and informal educational contexts. Such learning spaces include schooling, the media, contact with Aboriginal peoples, family/friends, and books, among other sources (Environics Institute for Survey Research, 2016).

Illuminating some of the information sharing efforts that have contributed to growing awareness of Indigenous experiences, this qualitative research project, rooted in the context of a localized TRC-inspired event, explores how everyday citizens engage with reconciliation. According to the TRC (2015e),

together, Canadians must do more than just *talk* about reconciliation; we must learn how to *practise* reconciliation in our everyday lives—within ourselves and

our families, and in our communities, governments, places of worship, schools, and workplaces. To do so constructively, Canadians must remain committed to the ongoing work of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships. (p. 126, emphasis in original)

Therefore, this project examines how Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples have come together to practice reconciliation through and between its contentions, contradictions, and complexities. My research considers the context of organizing and delivering the TRC-inspired event in addition to the participants' lives outside of the event. In this second instance, the event merely served as a participant sampling source (i.e., the event's email listserv that was used for participant recruitment did not limit the broader focus of the research study questions). In developing a study based on a specific event, this research also illuminates the ways in which localized events can, and cannot, take up national issues in their specific contexts.

The research questions presented above served as a guide for my conversations with interview participants regarding their understandings and actualization of reconciliation. While my initial goal was to discuss the implications of the event on the participants' understandings of reconciliation, it appeared to have little bearing on their personal life or practice. Instead, we discussed their personal interests, professional practices, and for the non-Indigenous participants, their ongoing learning about Indigenous issues, of which the event was one example. The limited focus on the event, among presenters and attendees in particular, speaks to the importance of ongoing learning over contained educational experiences (e.g., the event discussed in this dissertation).

This research contributes to the growing body of literature around decolonization and reconciliation. As a settler Canadian, I have found it difficult to find an entry point into research in the fields of Indigenous education and Indigenous Studies. Looking toward the future, this project aims to provide a solid foundation for me to continue work in this area. Moreover, given the colonizing impacts of research and research activities being a source of cultural appropriation (Davis, 2004; Haig-Brown, 2010), this research informs ways for other non-Indigenous peoples to enter the field in an ethically responsive way.

Overall, this research aims to reveal how reconciliation is understood by those who are taking it up in their personal and/or professional lives. There is significant conceptual literature regarding reconciliation, along with the multi-volume efforts of the TRC, which I discuss in my literature review in chapter three. However, it is the beliefs, words, and actions of everyday Canadians that contribute to, or restrict, the practical efforts of reconciliation in Canada. Despite the notion that there is no relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples to conciliate, the words of Senator Murray Sinclair provide a clear rationale for considering the importance of reconciliation in Canada: “you don’t have to believe that reconciliation will happen; you have to believe that reconciliation must happen” (Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, 2018, no page).

A Note on Terminology

As Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) asserts, “by ‘naming the world’ people name their realities” (p. 159). Therefore, it is important that I provide explanation for some of the terms that I have selected, while acknowledging that I have chosen to

exclude others. Although the terms described below are intricately connected, I have defined them separately.

Indigenous and Aboriginal

For Wolfe (2013), “the simplest definition of Indigenous people, after all, is that they are the only ones who have not come from somewhere else” (p. 7). This term exists in a post-contact world in which Indigenous peoples had, and continue to use, their own language words to describe themselves. While the term Aboriginal identifies Indigenous peoples in the Canadian context, where Canada’s *Constitution Act, 1982* defines Aboriginal as including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, I am cognisant of the fact that the First Peoples had this term imposed on them and some deem it offensive. For example, Alfred and Corntassel (2005) describe the word Aboriginal as a “state construction that is instrumental to the state’s attempt to gradually subsume Indigenous existences into its own constitutional system and body politic since Canadian independence from Great Britain” (p. 598). Recently there has been a shift away from using the term Aboriginal towards using Indigenous, or preferably, the specific community or nation. Wilson (2008) acknowledges the political nature of the term *Indigenous*, which asserts collective rights and self-determination for Indigenous peoples at an international level. However, this homogenization is also problematic because it groups together distinct populations who had and continue to have different experiences with colonization (Smith, 2012).

I use the term Indigenous throughout, and Aboriginal where used in the literature. Wherever possible, I use the specific nation of each person or group to respectfully acknowledge where he/she/they come from. I use the word peoples instead of people to

recognize the politicization of Indigenous identity. Recognizing personhood, the “final ‘s’ in ‘peoples’ has been argued for quite vigorously by indigenous activists because of the right of peoples to self-determination. It is also used as a way of recognizing that there are real differences between different indigenous peoples” (Smith, 2012, p. 7). I have also chosen to capitalize the “I” at the beginning of Indigenous as a marker of respect (Indigenous Corporate Training Inc., 2019; Vowel, 2016).

Non-Indigenous and Settler

Indigenous peoples have been on Turtle Island (North America) since time immemorial (RCAP, 1996a). For example, the word *Anishinaabe*, which includes the Ojibway, Odawa, and Potawatomi nations, means the “Original Man” (Benton-Banai, 2010, p. 3). Lowman and Barker (2015) use the term settler so that

‘Settler’ as an identity mirrors the construction of ‘Indigenous’ in contemporary terms: a broad collective of peoples with commonalities through particular connections to land and place. For Settler people, however, those connections are forged through violence and displacement of Indigenous communities and nations. (p. 2)

I use the terms settler, non-Indigenous, or non-Aboriginal to identify any person whose ancestors are not originally from this land (i.e., Canada). This includes those born in Canada and those who migrate/migrated here. Unlike other authors (i.e., Lowman & Barker, 2015; Sisco, 2015), I do not capitalize the term to make my position explicit in challenging its dominance.

It is important to acknowledge the diverse communities that make up the larger group of settlers, which further complicates any conceptualizations of settler identity.

Lowman and Barker (2015) provide this helpful description:

Settler Canadians are a multi-ethnic people, encompassing vast disparities of wealth and economic opportunity, huge ranges of education and experience, and a massive variety of ways of identifying with respect to gender, sexuality, and other overlapping markers of identity who, all the same, are complicit in settler colonialism. (p. 69)

Thobani (2007) also recognizes that “‘national’ worthiness is certainly not distributed evenly among all subjects” (p. 21) whereby settlers do not experience the same privileges based on differences of class, gender, sexuality, and ability. Worth acknowledging here is what Tuck and Yang (2012) call the triad of settler-native-slave as a structure of colonialism⁵ which explicitly connects to the previous description of Indigenous. Tuck and Yang (2012) note that in this triad, “Indigenous is an identity independent of the triad, and also an ascribed structural location within the triad” whereas “chattel slave is an ascribed structural position, but not an identity,” and “settler describes a set of behaviors, as well as a structural location, but is eschewed as an identity” (p. 7). Similarly, Thobani (2007) writes about the privileged “national subject,” that is, the white, Euro-Canadian, who is constructed in opposition to the “‘Indians, immigrants, and refugees” (p. 4). Like the term Indigenous, there is much to consider when using the term settler.

⁵ I discuss settler colonialism in chapter two.

Dissertation Overview

This dissertation is divided into seven chapters and includes a prologue and epilogue. In chapter one, I provided context for the research problem and presented my research questions. In chapter two, I outline the relational framework which informs this dissertation research. Chapter three offers a review of the literature regarding the topic of this dissertation in which I focus on, namely, reconciliation. I offer a historical review of the Canadian settler government's interpretation of reconciliation from the release of RCAP to the TRC. In addition, I include literature from Indigenous political organizations, Indigenous thought leaders, and perspectives from the academic community. Outlining this broad literature base helps to contextualize reconciliation in Canada from the diverse interested cohorts including Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Chapter four provides an overview of the methodological considerations framing this research project including choice of narrative inquiry, methods, data sources, data analysis processes, and discussion of the ethical issues that arose. In chapter five, I present the findings and analysis from the conversational interviews I held with organizers, presenters, and attendees of the event. This chapter offers insight into the ways that participants described reconciliation as being difficult and participants' actions for reconciliation through education and relationship building. In chapter six, I discuss the participants' perspectives about reconciliation alongside the relevant literature. In this chapter, I come to terms with the challenges of defining reconciliation given the diverse contexts in which it exists. In chapter seven, I reflect on the major findings as presented in chapters five and six. I also address the strengths and limitations of the study and conclude with suggestions for future research. I conclude the dissertation with an

epilogue to engage with my third research question, that is, how do I make meaning of reconciliation as a settler person in Canada and what are my responsibilities?

Chapter Two: Relational Framework

In this chapter, I present a relational framework that I developed through close examination of various paradigms, perspectives, theories, and concepts. I agree with Sisco (2015) when she states that “in a research context, the term ‘relational’ conveys an organic and reciprocal way of coming to know through collaborative knowledge seeking and gathering,” whereas, “‘theory’ tends to connote the deliberate imposition of an academic viewpoint through the more recent traditions of scientific inquiry and empiricism” (p. 104). Put another way, no one paradigm or theory has helped me to develop my research questions or shape my interpretation of the data; instead, it is the analogous aspects of each and the emergent and interrelated possibilities I uncovered between them that are most significant to me.

As Cresswell (2007) notes, it is imperative that researchers make explicit the assumptions, paradigms, and frameworks informing their work and have awareness of the ways that these components influence their research approach. In many ways, the philosophical assumptions rooting this framework explain how I have viewed the world since before I had the language to describe it. This chapter explicates, beyond my positionality described in the prologue, how I understand the research problem posed in this dissertation and how I interpret the information I have collected.

Qualitative Research and its Implications for Theory

Most broadly, this research project is qualitative. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) purport that “qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (p. 3) where there are no prescribed paradigms, theories, or methodological practices. As an interpretive endeavour (Creswell, 2007; Kovach, 2009), qualitative

research design begins with the researcher's philosophical assumptions that include their own worldviews, paradigms, and beliefs (Cresswell, 2007). These views within a qualitative framework contrast with those within a quantitative research paradigm. Nêhiyaw and Saulteaux scholar Margaret Kovach (2009) provides an articulate distinction between the two:

Quantitative research, flowing from a positivist paradigm, assumes that objective neutrality can exist within research so long as lurking variables are controlled.

Qualitative research, however, is built upon an interpretive presumption, and assumes that subjectivity within research will be a constant. (p. 32)

To extend further, in qualitative research, the search for meaning is imbued with the researcher's relationship to the inquiry process.

My researcher relationship aligns with Fine's (1994) influential work on the Self-Other hyphen. Fine (1994) states: "By *working the hyphen*, I mean to suggest that researchers probe how we are in relation with the contexts we study and with our informants, understanding that we are all multiple in those relations" (p. 72, emphasis in original). Shoring up support for Fine's theorization of the hyphen is my decolonizing approach to research, which I understand based on the work of Denzin and Lincoln (2008):

[A]ll inquiry is both political and moral. [I use] methods critically, for explicit social justice purposes. [I value] the transformative power of indigenous, subjugated knowledges ... [and seek] forms of praxis and inquiry that are emancipatory and empowering. ... [I commit to] decoloniz[ing] Western

methodologies, to criticize and demystify the ways in which Western science and the modern academy have been part of the colonial apparatus. (p. 2)

I also assert a relational framework that is informed by the “possibilities [of] qualitative research that is designed *against* Othering, *for* social justice, and pivoting identities of Self and Other *at* the hyphen” (Fine, 1994, p. 81, emphasis in original). Throughout the dissertation I, like Debassige (personal communication, April 7, 2020), purposefully use first-person pronouns in this document (e.g., using “I” statements). During a written correspondence discussing an earlier draft of this chapter, he outlined several complexities in the possibility of using a self-referential approach. Here I have inserted a fulsome inclusion of the written correspondence to accurately represent what he shared:

On a pragmatic level, this self-referential approach is intended only for me. It represents a continuing effort toward an immersive critical and decolonizing engagement that serves to actuate a conscious attention to the tensions, slippages, and contradictions in my own thinking, writing, and behaving. However, this approach comes with great risk. On its own, self-reference directly implicates navel-gazing (i.e., a self-indulgence). Today, in my evolving conceptualization of this idea, the insertion of I is intended to prompt me (and my readers) to mindfully practice a shift in consciousness toward an Indigenous futurity. Explicitly inserting a perceptible self-referential cue also reminds me about the capillary nature of obscured and assumed power relations in my daily life, while, simultaneously, making explicit the contradictory nature of self-reference in Indigenous contexts. Thus, my use of I invites, at least, a double bind (i.e., a conflicting and unresolved dilemma). Working on projects involving Indigenous

peoples remains eternally incomplete without meaningfully collaborating and consulting (e.g., through free, prior and informed consent), implicating locality, and/or surrendering the lead to Indigenous peoples, especially when the project occurs within their own localities/territories. Therefore, this approach to inserting I, as included in writing, is also intended to recognize the perilous condition inflicted on Indigenous futurity by primarily leading on my own (e.g., partially eschewing collectively held Indigenous knowledge and the understanding of the inherent responsibilities contained therein). Overall, this evolving theorization presented here is buttressed by the deeper implications of the intended meaning. My goal is aspirational and, in its use, will undoubtedly be confused with my intent being left unfulfilled, even among the intelligentsia. How, then, shall I proceed? “With caution,” I respond.

This self-referential conceptualization is one I share, and it inspires me to make concrete changes in my personal and professional life. While my use of self-referential pronouns in this dissertation stems from my self-location, as a non-Indigenous woman, I cautiously use anti-oppressive theories and approaches to inform my careful attention to Indigenous futurity. My intention is to achieve the deeper reflexive complexion of Debassige’s theorization through my own cognitive labour prompted by each signpost (i.e., self-referential cue) and beyond. With Debassige as my supervisor, my approach also includes a direct cross-cultural collaboration with an Indigenous faculty member. While incomplete on its own, my student-supervisor mentee relationship contains countless discussions that directly embeds a model of Indigenous–non-Indigenous collaboration into this document.

While challenging to exactly pinpoint, I believe the philosophical assumptions that most prominently inform my engagement with this research, and how I understand the world more generally, include those of the critical paradigm, social constructivism (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011), and Indigenous research paradigms⁶ (Wilson, 2008). These philosophical foundations come together as a bricolage. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) remark that a bricoleur produces “a pieced-together set of representations that are fitted to the specifics of a complex situation” (p. 4). Aligned with my interest in and support of the critical paradigm, the bricolage “reflects an evolving criticality in research” (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011, p. 167). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) further suggest that “the interpretive bricoleur understands that research is an interactive process shaped by one’s personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity and those of the people in the setting” (p. 5). This aligns with the belief of the constructivist paradigm, which I share, that the researcher’s background, stemming from their own experiences, informs their interpretive role in the research (Cresswell, 2007). The crystallization of these sources of knowledge and interpretative devices form the bricolage and are the foundation of my relational framework.

In the following sections of this chapter, I describe the theories and concepts aligned in my relational framework. In the first section, I outline the tenets of critical theory, critical race theory (CRT), and tribalcrit. Next, I describe how decolonizing theory informs this research, specifically through relationality, a concept which is central to Indigenous research paradigms (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). I do so by describing

⁶ Wilson (2008) uses the phrase “Indigenous research paradigm.” I have chosen to use this phrase in the plural formation to resist using “Indigenous” as a homogenizing word.

my relationality to Indigenous peoples through settler colonialism and whiteness. I conclude with a section outlining the commensurability between these theories and concepts.

Critical Theory

There is some distinction in the academic literature about the identification of critical theory/theories as a paradigm, as Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2011) and Denzin and Lincoln (2011) have suggested, or as an interpretive framework, as described by Cresswell (2007). I ascribe to many of the philosophical assumptions of the critical paradigm, such as reality being shaped by social, political, ethnic, and gendered values that are crystallized over time, which seem too all-encompassing to be a singular theory. I also agree with Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2011) when they suggest that there are commensurable elements of the constructivist and critical paradigms, such as the subjectivist nature of knowledge.

Kincheloe, McLaren, and Steinberg (2011) advise that critical theory avoids specificity, and further, “to lay out a set of fixed characteristics of the position is contrary to the desire of such theorists to avoid the production of blueprints of sociopolitical and epistemological beliefs” (p. 163). However, more broadly, critical theory is concerned with empowering people to resist and confront injustices they experience based on race, class, and/or gender (Cresswell, 2007; Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011). Further, goals of critical work include the emancipation of disempowered peoples, action to address inequality, and the promotion of individual freedoms in a democratic society (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). However, I am reminded of the potential outcomes of research when Kovach (2005) states, “critical research can be emancipatory—or *not*—

depending on where you want to take it (either way it's political)" (p. 20, emphasis in original).

Kincheloe, McLaren, and Steinberg (2011) provide a list of assumptions relevant to critical theory. They assert that: (a) power mediates all thought which is socially and historically situated; (b) facts are not value-free; (c) capitalism mediates the relationship between "concept and object," and "signifier and signified" (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011, p. 164); (d) language is important to subjectivity; (e) some groups are privileged more than others in society, but, oppression is most powerfully reproduced when the disempowered accept their disadvantage; (f) oppression is intersectional; and, (g) research is implicated in the reproduction of oppression. These assumptions inform how I understand the interactions between privileged and oppressed peoples and the systemic ways in which this oppression is reproduced. This has implications on the research relationship I have as a non-Indigenous person with the Indigenous participants involved with this study, and with Indigenous experiences more broadly. I speak more about this in chapter four on methodology.

The critical paradigm also advocates for the questioning of research agendas instead of merely accepting them (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011), aligned with the assumption of qualitative research more generally that knowledge is not neutral (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Furthermore, research in the critical paradigm is "driven by the study of social structures, freedom and oppression, and power and control" (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011, p. 103) in which the researcher "attempt[s] to conduct research to improve social justice and remove barriers and other negative influences associated with social oppression" (p. 112). In the context of this research project, CRT offers more,

conceptually, for analyzing the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada than critical theory on its own.

Critical Race Theory

This research project is rooted in the reality that Indigenous peoples experience a specific form of racialized oppression, of which the residential school system was one tool. CRT grew out of Critical Legal Studies in the 1970s based on the work of Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Mari Matsuda. CRT holds true that racism is a normalized process (Ladson-Billings, 1998) formed through racist behaviours, ideologies, structures, and politics (St. Denis, 2007). Parker and Lynn (2002) note that CRT has three main goals: “to argue for the eradication of racial subjugation while simultaneously recognizing that race is a social construct,” “to draw important relationships between race and other axes of domination,” and, “to present storytelling and narratives as valid approaches through which to examine race and racism in the law and in society” (p. 10). I describe each of these three goals in more detail below.

Acknowledging that race is a fluid construct (Parker & Lynn, 2002), CRT holds that “race and races are products of social thought and relations. Not objective, inherent, or fixed, they correspond to no biological or genetic reality; rather, races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 7). Bonilla-Silva (1997) takes this further by criticizing the notion that race and racism alone is ideological; he instead uses the phrase “racialized social structure” (p. 469) which purports that social institutions are established through strategically ordering people based on racial categories. In this context, racism is a “segment of the ideological structure of a social system that crystallizes racial notions and stereotypes. Racism

provides the rationalizations for social, political, and economic interactions between the races” (Bonilla-Silva, 1997, p. 474). Like other critical efforts, CRT intends to end oppression, with a specific focus on racial oppression (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Tate, 1997).

CRT has expanded to acknowledge the intersectionality of oppression. Given that “no person has a single, easily stated, unitary identity” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 9), Dei (2010) coined the term integrative antiracism studies. Dei (2010) deems this approach necessary because of the complexity of oppression and the ways in which one’s position as an oppressor or oppressed is not fixed depending on the situation based on “relations of race, class, gender, age, disability, sexuality, nationality, religion, language, and culture” (p. 18). However, as Dhamoon (2015) reminds us, the goal in understanding these interlocking sites of oppression is not to participate in “an Oppression Olympics framework, whereby groups are positioned as if they are competing for the mantle of the most oppressed, without disrupting hegemonies of power” (p. 22). Instead, an intersectional approach to CRT allows theory to more accurately reflect the actual lived experiences of oppression which is limited by critical theory alone.

The final aspect of CRT which has implications for this project includes its effort to include storytelling and narratives. Because CRT values experiential knowledge, narrative accounts, testimonies, and stories are viewed as legitimate sources of data (Brayboy 2005; Khalifa, Dunbar, & Douglas, 2013; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Sharing one’s story helps to name experiences, give voice, allow others to realize their experience is not isolated, and demand change (Chase, 2011; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). As Chase (2011) notes, “the act of speaking to be heard references an ‘other’ who needs to hear, to

listen, to pay attention” (Chase, 2011, p. 428). In this research context, I believe I am that “other,” a settler, who needs to listen to stories of Indigenous experiences and non-Indigenous interactions related to reconciliation.

Stories in a CRT context can also challenge preconceived notions of race (Khalifa, Dunbar, & Douglas, 2013; Parker & Lynn, 2002) and help readers to better understand racialized experiences (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Vass, 2014). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) write about master narratives which privilege “Whites, men, the middle and/or upper class, and heterosexuals by naming these social locations as natural or normative points of reference” (p. 28). Counter-narratives or counter-stories instead include the voices of those who are not often shared (i.e., those on the margins of society), or are used as a “tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege. Counter-stories can shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32). Later, in the chapter on methodology, I discuss the role of narrative in this research project.

While CRT considers oppression beyond race, tribalcrit has emerged out of CRT to reflect the “multiple, nuanced, and historically- and geographically-located epistemologies and ontologies found in Indigenous communities” (Brayboy, 2005, p. 427). In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss the Indigenous-related theories and concepts that inform the framework I have constructed which return me to elements of CRT, including whiteness.

TribalCrit

Pointing out that CRT does not always consider colonization, Lawrence and Dua (2005) identify the need to “decolonize antiracism” so that frameworks incorporate understandings of Canada as a colonial state. Lumbee scholar, Bryan Brayboy (2005), articulates a form of CRT he has coined tribalcrit which is a “more culturally nuanced way of examining the lives and experiences of tribal peoples since contact with Europeans over 500 years ago” (p. 430). This, like other derivatives of CRT that have emerged, including Latcrit, Asiancrit, and queer-crit, provide greater specificity in articulating the experiences of marginalized peoples in their specific contexts. This is reflective of the need to avoid homogenizing peoples’ experiences, such as specifying Indigenous peoples’ specific nations or communities.

Writing in the American context, Brayboy (2005) identifies nine tenets of tribalcrit. Firstly, this framework is based on the premise that “colonization is endemic to society” (p. 429) in which Eurocentric knowledge and power structures dominate society. Second, in the United States, and arguably in Canada, “policies toward Indigenous peoples are rooted in imperialism, White supremacy, and a desire for material gain” (Brayboy, 2005, p. 429), most notably, the colonial desire for land (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Wolfe, 2006). The third tenet of tribalcrit relates to the liminal space Indigenous peoples occupy “as legal/political and racialized beings” (Brayboy, 2005, p. 432). In both America and in Canada, Indigenous peoples have a legal/political relationship to the government as distinct nations and are a racialized group in larger society. In Canada, Indigenous peoples are defined in the *Constitution Act, 1982* and further, First Nations

are legally defined/confined by the *Indian Act*.⁷ However, despite their status, Indigenous peoples are racialized in general society so that white settlers construct themselves as the norm. The fourth component of tribalcrit includes that Indigenous peoples seek autonomy, self determination, and the right to self-identification in asserting and applying their sovereignty. Brayboy's (2005) fifth tenet states that culture, knowledge, and power have new meanings in an Indigenous context in which "culture is simultaneously fluid or dynamic, and fixed or stable" (p. 434) and is linked to land. Next, the sixth component of tribalcrit relates to governmental policies and educational policies regarding Indigenous peoples as tied to the goal of assimilation, while keeping in mind that education can bring together Indigenous and Euro-Western perspectives to "actively engage in survivance, self-determination, and tribal autonomy" (Brayboy, 2005, p. 437). The seventh tenet acknowledges the diversity and importance of beliefs, customs, and traditions among Indigenous peoples. Like CRT, tribalcrit places high value on stories as they make up theory "and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being" (Brayboy, 2005, p. 430). Finally, the last tenet of tribalcrit, and again like CRT, involves action: "TribalCrit must be praxis at its best. Praxis involves researchers who utilize theory to make an active change in the situation and context being examined" (Brayboy, 2005, p. 440). These components of tribalcrit integrate the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the critical paradigm, but with specific attention to Indigenous experience. This is particularly important for my relational framework as it is

⁷ The *Indian Act*, first passed in 1876, remains the legal framework in Canada for defining First Nations status. The purpose of the legislation was, and remains, to provide the settler government authority over Indigenous peoples.

something that I cannot understand from my lived experience but is inherently embedded in this research.

Lawrence and Dua (2005) write about the importance of incorporating how Indigenous peoples resist ongoing colonization, which they explicitly link to land:

At the core of Indigenous survival and resistance is reclaiming a relationship to land. Yet, within antiracism theory and practice, the question of land as contested space is seldom taken up. From Indigenous perspectives, it speaks to a reluctance on the part of non-Natives of any background to acknowledge that there is more to this land than being settlers on it, that there are deeper, older stories and knowledge connected to the landscapes around us. (p. 126)

This perspective adds to my relational framework as a reminder of the importance of land to Indigenous peoples. Carlson (2017) offers an aligned statement regarding settler engagement with decolonization:

With increasing engagement of white settler scholars in theorizing decolonization, scholars who carry this colonial socialization and the scholarly practices associated with it, it is no surprise to observe theory devoid of its connections to practice (action) and to land. (p. 496)

Throughout my writing of this dissertation, I have reminded myself of what it means to be a privileged white settler on treaty land in Canada. In the following section, I outline how decolonizing theory contributes to my relational framework in ways that help me to further understand my relationship to land and Indigenous peoples.

Decolonizing Theory

“Decolonization is not an ‘and’. It is an elsewhere” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 36).

The colonization of Canada, and other locations, was, and remains, intimately connected to capitalism (Loomba, 2005; Memmi, 1965; Smith, 2012; Tuck & Yang, 2012). In this way, Loomba (2005) links economic and cultural forces to describe colonialism as “the take over of territory, appropriation of material resources, exploitation of labour and interference with political and cultural structures of another territory or nation” (p. 11). Tuck and Yang (2012) suggest that colonialism must be understood both globally and historically, but in order to avoid using it as a metaphor, the question ““what is colonization?” must be answered specifically, with attention to the colonial apparatus that is assembled to order the relationships between particular peoples, lands, the ‘natural world’, and ‘civilization’” (p. 21). Therefore, it is important to differentiate between colonialism in countries such as India, and settler colonialism in Canada, New Zealand, and Australia, where the colonizers remain on the land that they have assumed sovereignty over (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Wolfe, 2006). It is helpful to think of this “invasion [a]s a structure [and] not an event” (Wolfe, 2006, p. 388) to support the conception that colonization in Canada is indeed not over; settlers remain on land that was stolen and a colonial government continues to maintain legislative authority over First Nations peoples (i.e., through the *Indian Act*). In this context, many scholars suggest that the term “post-colonial” does not apply to settler colonial contexts and that postcolonial theory is limited in its application to such locations (Smith, 2012; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Another feature in the perpetuation of colonization in Canada is its sustained presence in organizational structures within contemporary society. According to Thobani (2007), European sovereignty was established across the colonial world through violence,

in which European power “became constituted in law as racial power, as racial violence” (p. 39). However, it is not only laws that are used to uphold the power of settlers: “Settler people are the primary beneficiaries of settler colonial structures designed to ensure that the intent to stay is supported by both material structures and also by *discourses* that reflect settler colonial ontological understandings of land and place” (Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 28, emphasis added). It is through colonial discourses that stereotypes, images, and stories are constructed to form conceptualizations and cognitive schemes about the Other. Disseminated in the media, education system, and in the stories we tell ourselves about what it means to be Canadian, these discourses serve to rationalize settler dominance. Thobani (2007) writes about the national subject (i.e., white, Euro-Canadian settler), “exalted above all others as the embodiment of the quintessential characteristics of the nation and the personification of its values, ethics, and civilizational mores” (p. 3) as produced in and through these discourses. It is through a relational construction that settlers were, and continue to be, defined in opposition to Indigenous peoples. However, as Wolfe (2006) notes, settler society both sought to replace and “recuperate indigeneity in order to express its difference – and, accordingly, its independence – from the mother country” (p. 389). For example, in the Canadian national anthem, perhaps the quintessential national discourse, settlers attempt to claim Canada as their “home and native land” (National Film Board of Canada, 1979).

For Smith (2012), decolonization exists in relation to colonization, where decolonization makes way for “possibility, a way out of colonialism” (p. 204). Additionally, decolonization has often been conceived as an official process of transferring systems of government (Smith, 2012). It can further be understood as “an

intensely political transformative process with the goal of regenerating Indigenous nationhood and place-relationships while dismantling structures of settler colonialism that oppose or seek to eliminate Indigenous peoples from the land” (Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 111). It is also necessary to avoid conflating goals of decolonization with other social justice initiatives. For example, Tuck and Yang (2012) criticize the common refrain “decolonize our schools” (p. 2), writing that decolonization “is a distinct project from other civil and human rights-based social justice projects” (p. 2). Tuck and Yang (2012) challenge the loose manner with which this term is used: “Decolonization is not a metaphor. When metaphor invades decolonization, it kills the very possibility of decolonization; it recentres whiteness, it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler. It entertains a settler future” (p. 3). Instead, decolonization must be focused on repatriation of land to Indigenous peoples (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

I also employ decolonizing theory to resist the ongoing perpetuation of colonizing research, that is, to challenge “research practices that perpetuate Western power by misrepresenting and essentializing indigenous persons, often denying them voice or identity” (Denzin, 2005, p. 935). Decolonization is not simply the token inclusion of Indigenous cultures, but instead, “involves a paradigm shift from a culture of denial to the making of space for Indigenous political philosophies and knowledge systems as they resurge, thereby shifting cultural perceptions of power relations in real ways” (Regan, 2010, p. 189). For Styres (2017), decolonization requires undoing “the privileging of dominant Euro-centred cultural values and beliefs in education, scholarship, knowledge production, the legitimization of intellectual capital, and the networks and systems of power” (p. 19). As I discuss in chapter four, while I do not have an Indigenous

worldview, I can use my privilege to make space for Indigenous knowledges and perspectives in research. I speak more about the ethical responsibilities of this work when I discuss my approach to methodology.

On a broader level, as my interest in research does not exist in a vacuum, I am reminded of my relationality to Indigenous peoples through colonialism. Donald (2009) states:

If colonialism is indeed a shared condition, then decolonization needs to be a shared endeavour. I am convinced that decolonization in the Canadian context can only occur when Aboriginal peoples and Canadians face each other across historic divides, deconstruct their shared past, and engage critically with the realization that their present and future is similarly tied together. (p. 5)

Decolonizing theory brings me into a unity of interest with Indigenous peoples' aim to overcome colonialism through the alignment of a fundamental goal within the critical paradigm: challenging oppression.

Regarding methodology, Kovach (2009) writes about three decolonizing approaches: a) tribal methodology that "puts tribal epistemologies at the centre" (p. 80); b) a critical approach where decolonizing theory is the centring epistemology to support transformative research; and c) a tribal-centred methodology with a decolonizing lens. The second approach uses theory to decolonize and reflects a critical theoretical basis, which is aligned with my approach to qualitative research. According to Kovach (2009), "it is possible to situate decolonizing methodologies as falling under the umbrella of an Indigenous research framework, but given its critical theoretical basis, it is more aligned with Western critical research methodologies" (p. 80). This supports my contention that

theory and methodology located within the critical paradigm has some application in decolonizing work. Because decolonizing research calls to interrupt settler colonialism, it is an appropriate approach for non-Indigenous researchers because it allows for those to become a part of the decolonizing project as well (Davis, 2004), and, as Tuck and Yang (2012) state, “settler colonialism and its decolonization implicates and unsettles everyone” (p. 7). I use this framework to aid in decolonizing my relationship with Indigenous peoples—that is, to engage in “a transformative process, one that cannot be fully revealed or understood until it is practiced” (Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 112); however, I acknowledge that there is no direct or simple way for non-Indigenous peoples to engage with the process of decolonization.

Relationality

Wilson’s (2008) description of his Indigenous research paradigm also informs my understanding of decolonizing theory. While writing from a Cree epistemological framework, and me thinking through his ideas from my Euro-Canadian settler epistemology, I have tried to understand and apply his assertion that “relationality seems to sum up the whole Indigenous research paradigm” (p. 70). Wilson (2008) writes about relations with people, with the environment and land, with the cosmos, and with ideas. Similarly, Kovach (2009) writes that “Indigenous inquiry is a relational methodology: its methods are dependent upon deep respect for those (or that) which it will involve, and those (or that) which will feel its consequence” (p. 174). I understand that this includes more than just the people involved in this research, as I turn to considerations of land in addition to animal and plant beings who are also subjected to colonial forces of exploitation from which I benefit (e.g., resource extraction). Returning to Fine’s (1994)

notion of working the hyphen, which Jones and Jenkins (2008) write about in an Indigenous-colonizer context, they note, “the indigene-colonizer collaboration – if we are open and susceptible – is a site of learning *from* difference rather than learning *about* the Other” (p. 480, emphasis in original). Circling back to ideas related to CRT, I reflect on my relational accountability to Indigenous peoples as a settler through an understanding of settler colonialism and whiteness, which I discuss in the following sections.

Settler Colonialism. Colonialism, which I described above, along with the term settler described in chapter one, come together in a way that is distinct from other forms of colonialism. Settler colonialism describes a new formation of people: a settler society that establishes governmental systems upon Indigenous lands (Lowman & Barker, 2015). Wolfe (2006) makes the connection between settler colonialism and the “organizing grammar of race” (p. 387) in which race “is made in the targeting” of racialized people (p. 388). Race is used in various ways, always to the benefit of whites, in what Wolfe (2006) calls the “logic of elimination.” In a settler colonial context like Canada, a goal of this elimination is the acquisition of land (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Wolfe, 2006).

Veracini (2010) comments on the systems that reproduce settler colonialism wherein “settler colonialism obscures the conditions of its own production” (p. 14), similar to the ways racism is invisibilized in society through the systems that maintain it (Winant, 2004). This relates to Veracini’s (2010) triangular relationship between settlers, Indigenous peoples, and “exogenous Others” (i.e., slave, migrants, imported labour) (p. 18), through which the settler can define him/herself as normative. Identifying the distinction between colonialism and colonization, Veracini (2010) notes that the first is an exercise of power over peoples, while the latter is an exercise over land. Wolfe (2006)

also makes a vital connection to land: “Whatever settlers may say—and they generally have a lot to say—the primary motive for elimination is not race (or religion, ethnicity, grade of civilization, etc.) but access to territory. Territoriality is settler colonialism’s specific, irreducible element” (p. 388). Settler colonialism as a concept contributes to my relational framework by describing my inherent positionality in (what is now) Canada as a settler, my relation to land, and it contributes to my interest in critical research. This is also described by Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Corntassel (2014): “whether using Indigenous words for ‘settler’ or the English word ‘settler’, these terms should be discomforting and provide an impetus for decolonial transformation through a renewed community-centered approach” (p. 2). Like Hiller (2017), I am interested in understanding, and then disrupting, “the ways in which settler identities, spaces, sense of home and place, and constructions of land and nation are brought into being, secured, and enforced through an interplay of settler colonial spatial technologies” which she describes as “an evolving set of mechanisms and practices that function to clear the land discursively, materially, and violently of its Indigenous occupants/owners in order to make way for (white) settlement and development” (p. 417). While myself, and even my family, might not have been in Canada during the introduction of oppressive policies, many of these laws are in effect today (e.g., the *Indian Act*) and I continue to benefit from the larger colonial system. Furthermore, the discursive processes of settler colonialism continue to inform how I participate in society everyday. For example, my family’s background and our normative legitimacy as (white) Canadian is never questioned which brings a sense of physical and cognitive security.

The concept of settler colonialism is challenged by Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Cornthassel (2014) where they instead focus on Indigenous resurgence. They state,

by centering Indigenous resurgence, we resist the disavowal of a colonial present still defined by Indigenous dispossession, we center transformative alternatives to this present articulated within Indigenous resurgence, and we remain attentive to the very ground upon which we stand. (p. 2)

Despite this critique, settler colonialism as a concept gives name to the structure of oppression that I benefit from and uncovers a need for challenging this oppression.

Whiteness. While not an explicit component of the settler colonial literature, I understand my relationality to settler colonialism through my whiteness, a concept which is also connected to CRT. Drawing on critical race scholar Cheryl Harris, Grande (2018) notes that “whiteness is best thought of as a form of property that carries material and symbolic privilege (e.g., job security, access to real estate, conceptions of beauty) that is conferred to whites, those passing as white, and ‘honorary’ whites” (p. 6). However, this whiteness “is only invisible for those who inhabit it” (Ahmed, 2004, para. 1). Like Clare Land (2015) in *Decolonizing Solidarity*,

my engagement with the workings of my own whiteness and my own colonial complicities in both my research and my attempts to contribute to Indigenous struggles is an informed and crucial element of my critique of whiteness. It recognizes that I am ‘very much part of the problem that [I am] trying to articulate’ and that ‘doing critical whiteness studies as a white necessitates that we place ourselves in it, otherwise we’ve missed the whole point.’ (with quotes from Probyn, 2004 as cited in Land, 2015, p. 22)

Going further, Veracini (2010) identifies a triangular relationship between settlers, Indigenous peoples, and “exogenous Others” (p. 18), where “centering race and seeing whiteness as a race allows us to understand that white is not the neutral base from which all else is judged” (Bergerson, 2003, p. 59). I remain conscious that my whiteness does not exist on its own: in society it exists in ways that result in material differences between my experiences and that of Others.

While there are critiques of whiteness studies, most notably that it encourages “cyclic discourses” which “reproduce and then recycle dominant discourses further empowering Whites” so that there is no action to transform systems (Earick, 2018, p. 802), I instead align with critical whiteness studies (CWS). Earick (2018) states that “CWS employs a CRT lens to expose and decenter Whiteness as the normative discourse through the use of counter narrative storytelling and revisionist historiography to address racism and White Supremacy” (p. 803). Through this approach, caution is raised about “theoretical” allies who reaffirm “White supremacy as they reduce race and racism to an exercise in discourse” (Earick, 2018, p. 808). CWS, emerging out of CRT, takes up the tenets of the critical paradigm in which action for transformation is paramount.

As Wilson (2008) states, relationality is the basis of his Indigenous research paradigm. However, as noted above, as a Euro-Canadian I cannot utilize this paradigm as he describes it because I will never have an Indigenous ontology and epistemology. Instead, I embrace relational accountability so that I am accountable to myself, and not only others; further, the research presented in this dissertation includes “methodology [that is] based in a community context (be relational) and [demonstrates] respect, reciprocity and responsibility (be accountable as it is put into action)” (Wilson, 2008, p.

99). I come to this relational position by reflecting on my settler colonial background, including my whiteness, and use that understanding to expose and disrupt those structures that oppress Others.

Conclusion

Kovach (2009) explicitly notes a relationship between decolonizing research and critical theory: “As long as decolonization is a purpose of Indigenous education and research, critical theory will be an allied Western conceptual tool for creating change” (p. 48). She also suggests that a decolonizing perspective built upon critical theory is a useful approach for analyzing power differentials between groups as an opportunity for transformation because it outlines the “role for both structural change and personal agency in resistance” (Kovach, 2009, p. 80). Here I have found alignment among my inclusion of critical theory, CRT, tribalcrit, and decolonizing theory.

While writing from the Australian context, Puch-Bouwman (2014) writes that “non-Indigenous researchers who study Indigenous people and issues are situated in a highly contested epistemological space” (p. 408). In building this relational framework, I have integrated concepts that I believe best explain the phenomenon in this study, while acknowledging that my reliance on aspects of Indigenous research paradigms put me in this contested space. I hope that the relational framework I have shared here, my bricolage, might be a space in between Indigenous and non-Indigenous research practices that respectfully bridges these epistemologies.

In the next chapter, I present a review of the relevant literature on reconciliation, and then in chapter four, I describe the methodologies used in this dissertation: narrative inquiry and decolonizing methodologies. As explained above, narrative and storytelling

are a common approach in critical research because of the mutual interest in sharing subjugated voices. In chapter four, I provide more explanation regarding the alignment between the relational framework shared here and my choices of methodology and methods.

Chapter Three: Literature Review

The question “what is reconciliation?” has become an important concern among Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples; thus, it is necessary to identify the diverse range of perspectives within its evolving discourse. As Graeme and Mandawe (2017) note, “reconciliation is a complex concept, and there is little agreement regarding how to define or go about it” (p. 1). Martin (2009) suggests that there is little public discourse about what the term means, possibly, because the details “are too difficult to determine, too contentious to declare, or because they may detract from the rhetorical power of the performance” (p. 52). However, in Canada, reconciliation tends to be grounded in its association with the residential school system (Chrisjohn & Wasacase, 2011; Graeme & Mandawe, 2017; Nagy, 2012) despite the assertion, from some Indigenous peoples, that land and sovereignty should be high priority items on any reconciliation agenda (Alfred, 2009; Corntassel & Holder, 2008; Manuel & Derrickson, 2017).

In this review of the literature, I present and discuss the emergence of a burgeoning discourse occurring within Canada surrounding the concept reconciliation. I divide this chapter into four sections. In the first two sections, entitled *The Settler State’s Position on Reconciliation*, and *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, respectively, I review various government, academic, and organizational literatures and present the Canadian settler government’s interpretation of reconciliation. I begin with an historical overview spanning nearly two decades that commences in year 1996 with the release of the final report from the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) and end with the election of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in year 2015. I then discuss the recent and most active period for the discourse surrounding reconciliation with the

release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC) final report in 2015. This report is the culminating document from the commission, which was funded by the Canadian federal government, but operated autonomously through the mandate established by the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA). In the third section, Indigenous Political Organizations and Indigenous Leadership, I present literature stemming from Indigenous political organizations, including the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and Indigenous thought leaders. Collectively, these three sections delineate the discourse of reconciliation in Canada while acknowledging that this concept entered the Canadian vernacular around the time of RCAP (James, 2017a). Finally, in the fourth section, Indigenous and non-Indigenous Scholar Perspectives, I outline positions from the academic community regarding the term reconciliation through three themes: reconciliation to control, reconciliation to normalize settler colonialism, and what reconciliation *could* be. As stated in chapter one, I use terminology reflective of the sources from which I draw. For example, the term Aboriginal is used in sources discussing the RCAP report, whereas the words Indigenous and Aboriginal are used in the TRC's report. As always, I use specific community names where possible.

The Settler State's Position on Reconciliation

The "Oka Crisis" of 1990 has been described as a "watershed event in the history of Indigenous-state relations" (Wakeham, 2012, p. 14). This "crisis" arose when Kanien'kehaka/Mohawk peoples actively resisted the expansion of a golf course and condominium development on an ancestral burial ground. The Kanien'kehaka established a blockade around their community and were subsequently confined in the blockade for 78 days (Marshall, 2019; Wakeham, 2012). In response to these events, RCAP was

established in 1991 with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal commissioners to address 500 years of Indigenous-settler conflict. The commission was co-chaired by former national chief of the AFN, Georges Erasmus, and Justice René Dussault from Québec, in addition to five other commissioners, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, with backgrounds in law and government (Doerr, 2015). While other reports have commented on the state of Indigenous issues in Canada (e.g., Hawthorn, 1966-67), RCAP (1996a) had a large mandate that included the following:

The Commission of Inquiry should investigate the evolution of the relationship among aboriginal peoples (Indian, Inuit and Métis), the Canadian government, and Canadian society as a whole. It should propose specific solutions, rooted in domestic and international experience, to the problems which have plagued those relationships and which confront aboriginal peoples today. The Commission should examine all issues which it deems to be relevant to any or all of the aboriginal peoples of Canada. (p. 12)

After four years of consultation and research, the final report published in 1996 totalled 4,000 pages and 64 pages of recommendations.

Across five volumes, the RCAP report discusses history, economic development, health, education, and life in the north. The report identifies challenges to the work of the commission, and of reconciliation, due to “limited understanding of Aboriginal issues among non-Aboriginal Canadians ... As one intervener described it, there is a ‘vacuum of consciousness’ among non-Aboriginal people. We would go further to suggest a pervasive lack of knowledge and perhaps even of interest” (RCAP, 1996c, p. 82). The report also discusses the role of education in addressing the lack of knowledge among

non-Indigenous peoples (RCAP, 1996c). Despite the report's findings and recommendations, there has been slow progress to increasing understanding among settler society. Over ten years after the release of RCAP, the *National Benchmark Survey*⁸ by the Environics Research Group (2008) found that at the time of their research in 2008, there was some, although not a strong, familiarity of Aboriginal issues among Canadians.

The final report from RCAP refers to reconciliation in relation to treaties, residential schools, and the overall relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. The report demanded a shift in responsibility to the Canadian government to change its approach, that is, to integrate Indigenous perspectives into its relationship with Indigenous peoples (TRC, 2015c). Asserting the connection between reconciliation and treaties, RCAP (1996b) states that “treaties are instruments of reconciliation” (p. 63). Further, proposing “avenues of reconciliation” (RCAP, 1996a, p. 12) through its findings and recommendations, RCAP called for a public inquiry into the residential school system. To reach reconciliation, the RCAP (1996a) commissioners noted that,

the government of Canada, on behalf of the Canadian people, must acknowledge and express deep regret for the spiritual, cultural, economic and physical violence visited upon Aboriginal people, as individuals and as nations, in the past. And they must make a public commitment that such violence will never again be permitted or supported. (p. 17)

⁸ The report was prepared for Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

RCAP's comprehensive review, recommendations, and clear direction delineated above, left the door open for the federal government to set a new course for its relationship with Indigenous peoples.

The federal government's official response to RCAP, entitled *Gathering Strength: Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan*, was released in January 1998; however, many have suggested that the RCAP report was essentially abandoned (AFN, 2006; TRC, 2015c; Turner, 2013). Instead of pursuing a truth commission into residential schools, as recommended by RCAP, the government chose to share a public statement accompanying the release of the action plan and made a \$350 million investment in the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (Corntassel & Holder, 2008). The *Statement of Reconciliation (Statement)*, read by the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, Jane Stewart (1998), reads in part:

The Government of Canada recognizes that policies that sought to assimilate Aboriginal people, women and men, were not the way to build a strong country. We must instead continue to find ways in which Aboriginal people can participate fully in the economic, political, cultural and social life of Canada in a manner that preserves and enhances the collective identities of Aboriginal communities, and allows them to evolve and flourish in the future. (para. 7)

Stewart's (2013) prelude to the *Statement* acknowledged that it was a "solemn offer of reconciliation" (p. 325) in which the government recognized the detrimental role it played in the residential school system. While the statement was a step towards admitting the government's culpability in the oppression of Indigenous peoples, it was heavily criticized.

One of the main critiques of the *Statement* was its limited scope. Corntassel and Holder (2008) suggest that Stewart's statement on behalf of the government was "carefully worded" and used "nondescript and guarded language" so that it would "close the book on the historical legacy of residential schools" (p. 473). The statement was also criticized for solely considering the historic harms of residential schooling as it only offered an apology to those who experienced sexual and physical abuse in the schools, with no acknowledgement of the ongoing impacts of the residential school system (Corntassel & Holder, 2008; Henderson & Wakeham, 2009; James, 2017b). Furthermore, the statement was rejected among Indigenous peoples as "inadequate" and "deeply insulting" (Regan, 2010, p. 182) given the profound harms caused by the government. The language used in the statement, and the steps that were to follow, could never adequately address the 500 years of conflict documented throughout the RCAP report.

Not only was the content of the *Statement* lacking (Corntassel & Holder, 2008; Nagy, 2014; Regan, 2010), but the procedures surrounding its delivery also contributed to criticism. For example, the statement was read during a lunchtime ceremony with the Prime Minister absent and did not contribute to the parliament's official record (Corntassel & Holder, 2008; James, 2017b). Writing about the meaning of apologies, James (2008) suggests that the absence of the Prime Minister constitutes an "improper ceremony" (p. 141), one of the eight criteria of an authentic political apology. Overall the 1998 *Statement* has been referred to as a "quasi-apology" (James, 2008; James, 2017b) in which the government attempted to detach the residential school system from the larger colonial project of assimilation (Nagy, 2014).

Moving beyond the content and protocol of the 1998 *Statement*, ten years later Prime Minister Stephen Harper offered an apology in the House of Commons on June 11, 2008. The apology reads, in part:

The government recognizes that the absence of an apology has been an impediment to healing and reconciliation. Therefore, on behalf of the Government of Canada and all Canadians, I stand before you, in this Chamber so central to our life as a country, to apologize to Aboriginal peoples for Canada's role in the Indian Residential Schools system. (Harper, 2008, para. 17)

Unlike the 1998 *Statement*, the apology was presented in the House of Commons by the Prime Minister and was offered as the official statement of apology. Using the House of Commons as the platform for the apology, it had a high profile in the media and among Canadians (Dorrell, 2009; Martin, 2009). The day before the apology, Harper stated that he would not allow alteration to parliamentary tradition and that there would be no response from Indigenous leaders (Mackey, 2013); however, Harper made a change of course and AFN National Chief, Phil Fontaine; President Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, Mary Simon; Métis National Council President, Clément Chartier; Native Women's Association of Canada President, Beverly Jacobs; and, Congress of Aboriginal Peoples National Chief, Patrick Brazeau all responded in the House of Commons. However, as Mackey (2013) notes, none of these speakers used language indicating that they explicitly accepted the apology offered by the Prime Minister. I discuss their responses in the section, Indigenous Political Organizations and Indigenous Leadership.

While the apology was viewed by some as a metaphor for “journeying ... forward” (Martin, 2009, p. 50), there were also several concerns regarding the content of

and absences in the apology. Some have called the apology an attempt at closure, and one that maintains a narrative of Canada as a peaceful nation (Dorrell, 2009; Henderson & Wakeham, 2013; Mackey, 2013), something Regan (2010) refers to as the peacemaker myth. Martin (2009) notes that “the event of the apology repeatedly drew attention to its own significance—a performative tactic geared, perhaps, at creating a sense of progress or impending change” (p. 50). The apology, along with progress of the IRSSA, which I speak more about in my discussion of the TRC, presented itself as a shift in the journey towards reconciliation in Canada. However, there has been critique of this process, notably that forgiveness was assumed. As Mackey (2013) suggests, the government’s involvement with the residential school system was presumably “apologizable” (p. 54) because the apology rooted the government’s actions in misunderstanding of the time, essentially linking it to attitudes without any consideration of the “social and political processes of colonial violence” (p. 54). Therefore, it was expected that the apology would simply be accepted by Indigenous peoples with no room left for dialogue: “From the outset the government assumed it was entitled to, and that it implicitly received, acceptance and forgiveness simply by speaking contrition” (Mackey, 2013, p. 58). Furthermore, like the 1998 *Statement*, the language in the apology problematically framed the concern as related to residential schools alone, without making linkages to the schools’ role in the larger colonial project (Dorrell, 2009; Mackey, 2013).

Mackey (2013) suggests that apology is a “central ritual in what is called the reconciliation process” (p. 48), while Regan (2010) proposes that they can be a “catalyst” (p. 177) for increasing understanding of Indigenous experiences. Unlike the fading dialogue and action surrounding the work of RCAP, momentum from the 2008 federal

apology was maintained by components of the IRSSA, perhaps most significantly, the TRC. However, it remained to be seen whether the apology would be fulfilled with action from the federal government.

Discourse of a Nation-to-Nation Relationship

Justin Trudeau campaigned for the Liberal Party of Canada (2015) in the 2015 federal election on a platform of a “renewed, nation-to-nation relationship with Indigenous Peoples, based on recognition, rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership” (p. 46). One of the key pieces of this “nation-to-nation relationship” was to be the enactment of the TRC’s 94 Calls to Action. In the Liberal Party of Canada’s (2015) platform statement, these goals are outlined in the following terms:

To support the work of reconciliation, and continue the necessary process of truth telling and healing, we will work alongside provinces and territories, and with First Nations, the Métis Nation, and Inuit, to enact the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, starting with the implementation of the United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* [UNDRIP]. (p. 48)

Following his election as Prime Minister with a majority government, Trudeau wrote a mandate letter to his Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs reaffirming the government’s position on the “nation-to-nation relationship with Indigenous peoples” (Trudeau, 2015, para. 7). However, at a meeting of the AFN in July 2016, the Justice Minister at the time, Jody Wilson-Raybould (2016), commented that adopting UNDRIP would be “unworkable” and “a political distraction” (p. 9). The government did not

proceed with formally adopting UNDRIP until it was proposed in a private member's bill by a member of the New Democratic Party (NDP) in 2019.

In 2017, Trudeau made a dramatic cabinet shuffle, splitting Indigenous and Northern Affairs into two new ministries: Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, and Indigenous Services. The new ministry of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs has an entire section on its website dedicated to reporting on the government's efforts of reconciliation (Canada, 2019). However, there has been substantial criticism of the Trudeau government's efforts towards reconciliation (Exner-Pirot, 2018; Manuel & Derrickson, 2017), particularly related to the federal approval of pipelines and the ongoing discrimination of Indigenous children in the child welfare system which has been brought to the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal. Some of these issues are described in more detail below in the section, Indigenous Political Organizations and Indigenous Leadership.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

As one of the most recent, prominent, and perhaps influential efforts of reconciliation, this section briefly outlines the journey to the TRC. In addition, I include remarks from the commissioners' report regarding its conceptualization of reconciliation. Finally, this section features the TRC's guiding principles of truth and reconciliation.

In the 1990s and into the 2000s, residential school survivors started to come forward into the public with stories of abuse at residential schools (James, 2017b). With the government disregarding recommendations from RCAP to hold an inquiry into the residential school system, survivors turned to the court system (Nagy, 2014). By 2006, there were 15,000 individual claims against the government and churches, 5,000

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) cases, and 11 class action lawsuits (Nagy, 2014). The federal government, in favour of something faster and cheaper (Corntassel & Holder, 2008; Regan, 2010), preferred the ADR process established in 2002. Regan (2010) notes that the ADR process is based on Western concepts of law as neutral justice, and, in drawing on interviews with stakeholders involved with establishing the TRC, Nagy (2014) asserts the following: “the government unilaterally created the program, and it pertained only to sexual and physical abuse. Claimants remained subject to humiliating and traumatizing cross-examination, and compensation was meagre” (p. 207). Overall, it was determined that reconciliation would not be achieved with ADR as it led to the mistreatment of survivors (Nagy, 2014).

Following strategic intervention from the AFN, given their concerns about the ADR process and lack of Indigenous legal tradition in the course of action being pursued (Mahoney, 2019), the settlement process changed course and in May 2006 the IRSSA was concluded and implemented by the courts starting in September 2007. The IRSSA included a “commitment to a holistic response” (Nagy, 2014, p. 209) that included compensation, in the form of a Common-Experience Payment, an education fund, and Individual Assessment Fund (Mahoney, 2019); and, a financial commitment to “commemoration, healing, and the establishment of the TRC” (Nagy, 2014, p. 200). Following the finalization of the IRSSA in 2007 and the federal apology for the residential school system in 2008 which was negotiated as part of the settlement (Mahoney, 2019), the TRC was established in 2008 making Canada the “first longstanding liberal democracy” to hold such a commission (Henderson & Wakeham, 2009, p. 11).

Truth and reconciliation commissions have been used around the world, mostly in the global South (Nagy, 2014). While truth telling efforts might differ in terms of mandate, scope, and power of the search (Nagy, 2014), “apologies and truth commissions are supposed to reconcile past injustices” (Corntassel & Holder, 2008, p. 466). They are generally guided by the following principles: that they acknowledge past wrongs, attend to the needs of victims, provide accountability, identify institutional responsibility and recommend reforms, and finally, promote reconciliation (Nagy, 2014; Rice & Snyder, 2008).

The TRC in Canada took years to establish following exploratory dialogues, roundtables, and negotiations leading to the IRSSA. The TRC (2015c) was noted by the commission to be a “a rare second chance to seize a lost opportunity for reconciliation” (p. 3) following the failure of RCAP to make the substantive changes it envisioned. With a \$60 million budget, the TRC was formally established by the IRSSA to engage in several tasks that included a truth telling and reconciliation process, a report on the IRS system, and recommendations to the government (Regan, 2010). The commission, which came to be led by Justice Murray Sinclair, now a Canadian Senator in parliament, also included Dr. Mary Wilson, and Chief Wilson Littlechild. They convened seven National Events and smaller events across the country (TRC, 2015d). As part of its truth-telling mission,

the Commission received over 6,750 statements from Survivors of residential schools, members of their families, and other individuals who wished to share their knowledge of the residential school system and its legacy.

Statements were gathered at public Sharing Panels and Sharing Circles at National, Regional, and Community Events and at Commission hearings. They were also collected through private conversations with statement gatherers. The Commission also gathered statements in correctional institutions. (TRC, 2015d, p. 29)

Despite the IRSSA providing instruction to the Canadian government and churches to turn over relevant documents, the Commission had difficulty obtaining access given their limited powers (e.g., could not hold formal hearings and had no subpoena powers; Schedule “N,” no date). As an additional step, they sought court instruction in how they could procure the resources they had requested (TRC, 2015d).

When the work of the TRC concluded, it produced a final report consisting of six volumes. The first five volumes establish the rationale for reconciliation in Canada: the residential school system and the ongoing, intergenerational fallout of this act of cultural genocide, and volume six is dedicated to reconciliation. In the first sentence of the sixth volume, the TRC (2015c) points to an inherent contradiction in the efforts of reconciliation in Canada: “To some people, ‘reconciliation’ is the re-establishment of a conciliatory state. However, this is a state that many Aboriginal people assert has never existed between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people” (p. 3). Then, the commissioners proceed to describe their own understanding of reconciliation: “To the Commission, ‘reconciliation’ is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country” (TRC, 2015c, p. 3) which is followed by a series of steps that must be taken including “awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and

action to change behaviour” (p. 3). Clearly relying on the education of non-Indigenous peoples as a part of the reconciliation process, the TRC points to the ways that non-Indigenous peoples are involved with this work.

The TRC’s (2015c) report also relies on the residential school system to contextualize their understanding of reconciliation, which informed the commission’s approach to reconciliation, as outlined here:

To others, ‘reconciliation,’ in the context of Indian residential schools, is similar to dealing with a situation of family violence. It is about coming to terms with events of the past in a manner that overcomes conflict and establishes a respectful and healthy relationship among people going forward. It is in the latter context that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (trc) has approached the question of reconciliation. (p. 3)

Going further, the TRC (2015c) extends reconciliation to the needs of Indigenous peoples and recognizes the need for reconciliation beyond residential schools: “The urgent need for reconciliation runs deep in Canada. Expanding public dialogue and action on reconciliation beyond residential schools will be critical in the coming years” (p. 4). Looking forward, the TRC references a need to extend beyond education about the history of residential schools toward discussion and activities that involve building a healthy relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

In 2012, residential school survivor Archie Little at the Regional (TRC) Event in Victoria, British Columbia shared: “[For] me reconciliation is righting a wrong. And how do we do that? All these people in this room, a lot of non-Aboriginals, a lot of

Aboriginals that probably didn't go to residential school; we need to work together"

(TRC, 2015c, p. 5). However, as Robinson (2015) points out,

despite repeated narratives of trauma invited by these events, many survivors made it known that what they had to say had no relation to the word reconciliation. Indeed, a number of survivors began their testimony by noting they had no idea what the word reconciliation meant, while others asserted that the word had no relationship to their current experience or future goals. (p. 62)

Describing an incident in which residential school staff and students shared conflicting testimony, the TRC (2015c) states "there are no easy shortcuts to reconciliation" and that "for many the time for reconciliation had not yet arrived. Indeed, for some, it may never arrive" (p. 11). The TRC's structure, at minimum, allowed survivors and their families to share stories as a form of healing, and summoned settler society to listen to Indigenous peoples' experiences to inform future actions.

The TRC's final report offers a list of guiding principles of truth and reconciliation that is worth fulsome inclusion here. In volume six, the TRC (2015c) outlines the following:

1. The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* is the framework for reconciliation at all levels and across all sectors of Canadian society.
2. First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples, as the original peoples of this country and as self-determining peoples, have Treaty, constitutional, and human rights that must be recognized and respected.

3. Reconciliation is a process of healing relationships that requires public truth sharing, apology, and commemoration that acknowledge and redress past harms.
4. Reconciliation requires constructive action on addressing the ongoing legacies of colonialism that have had destructive impacts on Aboriginal peoples' education, cultures and languages, health, child welfare, administration of justice, and economic opportunities and prosperity.
5. Reconciliation must create a more equitable and inclusive society by closing the gaps in social, health, and economic outcomes that exist between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.
6. All Canadians, as Treaty peoples, share responsibility for establishing and maintaining mutually respectful relationships.
7. The perspectives and understandings of Aboriginal Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers of the ethics, concepts, and practices of reconciliation are vital to long-term reconciliation.
8. Supporting Aboriginal peoples' cultural revitalization and integrating Indigenous knowledge systems, oral histories, laws, protocols, and connections to the land into the reconciliation process are essential.
9. Reconciliation requires political will, joint leadership, trust building, accountability, and transparency, as well as a substantial investment of resources.
10. Reconciliation requires sustained public education and dialogue, including youth engagement, about the history and legacy of residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal rights, as well as the historical and contemporary contributions of Aboriginal peoples to Canadian society. (p. 16)

Like the principles of reconciliation outlined by the TRC, residential school survivor Archie Little shared further about the need for action to support the resurgence of cultures and languages. He stated:

My mother had a high standing in our cultural ways. We lost that. It was taken away... And I think it's time for you non-Aboriginals ... to go to your politicians and tell them that we have to take responsibility for what happened. We have to work together. (TRC, 2015c, p. 5)

These principles, and the perspective of Mr. Little, speak to the institutional and personal components of activating reconciliation within the nation state of Canada. Attention to issues, along with adequate resourcing, across all institutions of society (i.e., education, child welfare, justice, etcetera) and investments among members of settler society, is essential for reconciliation to produce healthy outcomes.

The TRC's work, as documented in its six-volume final report and in the 94 Calls to Action, clearly demarcates its conceptualization of reconciliation. The TRC focuses on bringing awareness to the legacy of oppression in Canada in child welfare, education, language and culture, health, and justice, in addition to reconciliation in frameworks such as UNDRIP, or through "education for reconciliation." Despite Indigenous involvement in the TRC's work, as part of the commission's structure and through the voices of survivors and families, the next section explicates the voices of Indigenous political organizations and thought leaders to bring attention to these specific perspectives.

Indigenous Political Organizations and Indigenous Leadership

While Indigenous peoples and organizations have been part of the movement towards reconciliation (e.g., RCAP, the TRC, and in other efforts), highlighting and

elevating the distinct voices and contributions of Indigenous peoples is essential. In this section, I summarize Indigenous responses to Harper's 2008 apology, the work of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, and excerpts of survivors' voices from the TRC's final report. Since reconciliation is not exclusively connected to the residential school system, I also include the AFN's perspective on efforts of reconciliation and those of Indigenous thought leaders in the context of colonial policy more broadly.

The Apology

In June 2008 when Prime Minister Stephen Harper offered an apology in the House of Commons, he was seated with several Indigenous representatives who followed his apology with their own remarks. The National Chief of the AFN at the time, Phil Fontaine, is regarded by many as the person who brought national attention to the abuse experienced by many Indigenous children in residential schools when he shared his story of abuse in 1990. At the end of his statement in the House of Commons, Fontaine (2008) shared his words with a deeply compassionate tone:

As a great statesman once said, we are all part of one 'garment of destiny'. The differences between us are not blood or colour and 'the ties that bind us are deeper than those that separate us'. The 'common road of hope' will bring us to reconciliation more than any words, laws or legal claims ever could.

We still have to struggle, but now we are in this together.

I reach out to all Canadians today in this spirit of reconciliation. (para. 14-16)

While Fontaine spoke of the work ahead for Canadians, other representatives in the House of Commons complimented his speech by pointing to the unresolved issues. Mary Simon, President of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (2008), passionately remarked: "Let us

not be lulled into an impression that when the sun rises tomorrow morning, the pain and scars will miraculously be gone. They will not” (para. 7). Clément Chartier (2008), President of the Métis National Council, spoke of how the Métis have been “excluded from many things by the workings of this House and its policies” and how they “want in” (para. 9). President of the Native Women’s Association of Canada, Beverly Jacobs (2008), concluded the session with calls to action on redressing ongoing abuses:

What is it that this government is going to do in the future to help our people? Because we are dealing with major human rights violations that have occurred to many generations: my language, my culture and my spirituality. I know that I want to transfer those to my children and my grandchildren, and their children, and so on. What is going to be provided? That is my question. I know that is the question from all of us. That is what we would like to continue to work on, in partnership. (para. 12)

Collectively, these leaders spoke of their hope for reconciliation and redress, but also underscored their hesitation and concerns when set against the backdrop of the government’s record on relationship building and the ongoing human rights violations involving Indigenous peoples.

The responses from these Indigenous leaders certainly did not conform to the “idealized teleology of national healing [in] which the state’s performance of contrition demand[ed] performative responses from those marginalized subjects it addresse[ed]” (Wakeham, 2012, p. 5). The public response to the ways that Indigenous representatives did not act in ways which were “recognizable or appropriate” (Wakeham, 2012, p. 5) was evident in media reports about reconciliation in terms of “truth-telling, healing, and

fence-mending” (James, 2017a, p. 374). There seemed to be little space for anger, discontent, or opposition to reconciliation. For example, in Anderson’s (2012) discourse analysis of reaction to the apology on the Canadian Broadcast Corporation’s online news site, she found that some members of the public responded to stories saying that “Aboriginal Canadians should simply get over the past and they reject[ed] the PM’s statement that today’s Canadians should share the weight of past mistakes” (p. 583). While the Indigenous leaders’ responses to the apology revealed a generalized frustration with reconciliation in Canada, settler society appeared largely uninterested in viewing or accepting this frustration.

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation

Funded through a \$350 million commitment in the *Gathering Strength—Canada’s Aboriginal Action Plan*, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF) operated for sixteen years. The organization ceased operations in 2014 when the federal government cut off funding and this closure came with significant criticism. Waldrum cited in Martin (2009) notes that “there seems to be *no end point to the journey*. No one is ever completely healed. No one speaks of being cured in the same way biomedicine uses this concept” (p. 55, emphasis in Martin). The foundation had a mandate to “encourage and support community-developed, community-delivered and culturally-based initiatives addressing the intergenerational effects of abuses suffered in the Indian Residential School System” (AHF, 2014, para. 2). They state that their mission was to,

provide resources which will promote reconciliation and encourage and support Aboriginal people and their communities in building and reinforcing sustainable healing processes that address the legacy of physical, sexual, mental, cultural, and

spiritual abuses in the residential school system, including intergenerational impacts. (AHF, no date, para. 2)

To support this work, the AHF released several resources on reconciliation including a three-part research series on truth and reconciliation. Some of these documents are referenced further below.

Survivors' Voices

The TRC's final report includes numerous excerpts from testimony shared at its National Events and smaller gatherings. In these instances, reconciliation is generally referenced as a possibility or as an aspirational goal yet to be achieved. For example, in 2010 at the TRC's Manitoba National Event, survivor Evelyn Brockwood made an important contribution regarding the time it will take for reconciliation:

When this came out at the beginning, I believe it was 1990, about residential schools, people coming out with their stories, and ... I thought the term, the words they were using, were *truth*, *healing* and *reconciliation*. But somehow it seems like we are going from truth telling to reconciliation, to reconcile with our white brothers and sisters. My brothers and sisters, we have a lot of work to do in the middle. We should really lift up the word *healing* ... Go slow, we are going too fast, too fast ... We have many tears to shed before we even get to the word *reconciliation*. (TRC, 2015c, p. 11, emphasis in original)

In another instance, a survivor posed questions about the use of the word reconciliation. At the 2014 Traditional Knowledge Keepers Forum, Survivor committee member and Elder, Barney Williams, shared: "from sea to sea, we hear words that allude to ... what is reconciliation? What does healing or forgiveness mean?" (TRC, 2015c, p. 12). While it is

not within the scope of this literature review to examine every survivor statement in the final report, or in the statements gathered for the final report, both of these comments speak to the way that the TRC's final report includes residential school survivor testimony that positions reconciliation as a possibility in Canada, at least, on the topic of residential schools.

Indigenous Leadership and Thought Leaders

The AFN, as the national advocacy group for First Nations in Canada, also has an important stake in the goal of reconciliation. In the context of the TRC and writing in preparation for the release of the final report, National Chief Perry Bellegarde (2015) shared his views on reconciliation:

I believe reconciliation is about closing the gap – the gap in understanding between First Nations and Canadians and the gap in the quality of life between us. ...

Reconciliation requires investments in First Nations education to realize the full potential of our children.

Canadians need education, too. Every citizen should learn our country's true shared history, from painful, shameful moments such as the residential schools and the Indian Act to uplifting moments like our original relationship – the promises we made to one another to share and live together in mutual respect and peaceful co-existence.

Reconciliation means repairing our relationship by honouring those original promises. (para. 2-6)

While the AFN has yet to publish any specific policy directives on their vision of

reconciliation, their current efforts have been focused on holding the Trudeau government accountable on their promises of reconciliation. These include calls for the government to sign Bill C-262 regarding the implementation of UNDRIP. In 2019, the Liberal Party supported the NDP private member's bill to implement UNDRIP, which failed to pass in the Senate.

Garnering significant attention to the federal government's relationship with Indigenous peoples was a remark from NDP Member of Parliament, Romeo Saganash, in September 2018. Communicating his frustration about the Trans Mountain Pipeline expansion, Saganash (2018) asked in the House of Commons:

Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister insists that this pipeline expansion will be done no matter what and his minister adds that Canada will not be able to accommodate all indigenous concerns, it means they have decided to willfully violate their constitutional duties and obligations. It sounds like a most important relationship, does it not?

Why does the Prime Minister not just say the truth and tell indigenous peoples that he does not give a fuck about their rights? (para. 12)

Initially, this comment might not seem connected to a discussion of reconciliation in the context of this study and is perhaps only noteworthy for its inflammatory word choice. However, as Manuel and Derrickson (2017) write in the context of land, sovereignty, and reconciliation, “what is broken is Canada and the issue is not merely behaviours, but fundamental rights – our land rights and the inalienable right to self-determination. The remedy is not apologies and hugs but recognition and restitution” (p. 57). Here Manuel

and Derrickson (2017) assert a clear distinction between the government's expectations for reconciliation and what Indigenous peoples demand from the process.

Offering a critical synthesis of changes to Indigenous policy and legislation in Canada, King and Pasternak (2018) of the Yellowhead Institute examine the proposed Indigenous Rights, Recognition and Implementation Framework announced by Trudeau in 2018. While acknowledging that the changes have been informed by efforts of reconciliation, "or, at the least, there is reference to the process of reconciliation" (King & Pasternak, 2018, p. 25), they also raise concern about these efforts:

while there are some welcome changes including resources for program and service delivery, there is also a clear attempt to maintain a modified version of the status quo, and as such, an effort to mislead First Nations on the transformational nature of these changes. (p. 27)

Similarly, in an opinion piece in *Maclean's Magazine*, Mi'kmaw lawyer and scholar, Dr. Pam Palmater (2019), identifies a few of the ways Trudeau has failed in his efforts of reconciliation with Indigenous peoples in Canada:

Sadly, he broke all of his promises by flip-flopping on his support of our right to say no to development (think Trans Mountain pipeline) and failing to repeal a single piece of Harper's First Nation legislation. He also denied First Nation women and children equality under the Indian Act (despite court and United Nations decisions directing him to stop) and failed to abide by the decision of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (and seven non-compliance orders) to stop discriminating against First Nations children in foster care. (para. 2)

Further, she contextualizes this statement among recent incidents in townhalls and meetings, pointing to a pattern of Trudeau's disrespect to First Nations people. The work of King and Pasternak, and of Palmater, speak to ongoing concern and critique of reconciliation efforts purported by the Canadian government.

Dr. Cindy Blackstock, of the Gitksan First Nation, and Executive Director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, has also shared her perspective on reconciliation in Canada. Fighting with the federal government for equal rights for Indigenous children and families for over ten years, in 2016, the Human Rights Tribunal found that the government discriminates against First Nations children. Writing to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, Blackstock (2011) noted that, "an important test of reconciliation is whether Canada's approach to addressing known harms to First Nations children arising from its actions have changed since the residential school era. There is little reason for encouragement" (p. 11). Here her comments, like those of King and Pasternak (2018) and Palmater (2019), point to the interconnected issues of reconciliation in Canada, that is, that reconciliation cannot just be a response to the residential school system.

The Indigenous voices shared in this section briefly speak to the complicated nature of reconciliation in Canada. For some, reconciliation is an aspirational goal. For others, unless the government explicitly recognizes and redresses its ongoing role in the oppression of Indigenous peoples beyond the historically-situated residential school system, reconciliation will never happen. Clearly, land, sovereignty, sustained funding, consideration of the impacts beyond residential schooling, with no restriction on the time it will take for healing are vital for any possibility of reconciliation in Canada.

Indigenous and non-Indigenous Scholar Perspectives

In the academic literature, reconciliation is discussed across temporal and spatial locations given its relevance around the world and throughout history. In this section, I synthesize the literature most relevant to the reconciliation process in Canada. Robinson (2015) talks about a “continuum of reconciliation relations in Canada” (p. 63), while de Costa and Clark (2011) describe it as a “vague aspiration” (p. 329). This difficulty conceptualizing reconciliation is discussed in more detail below. Drawing from Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars, I have grouped the literature into three themes: reconciliation as a tool to control, reconciliation to normalize settler colonialism, and what reconciliation *could* be.

Reconciliation to Control

The discourse of reconciliation in Canada has mostly been used in the context of residential schools, but also with regards to land, self-determination, child-welfare, and most generally, about the relationship between Indigenous peoples and settler society. However, this is problematic when governments continue to maintain control over “land, sovereignty, and duration of atonement” with attraction to “rhetorical gestures” (Wakeham, 2012, p. 4). Through a scan of the literature, I found that settler governments use the language of reconciliation to control the processes, outcomes, and narratives of reconciliatory activities.

When governments frame their actions as being for reconciliation, it is done to establish dominance and to control the processes of reconciliation. In practice, Nagy (2014) notes that the idea of truth and reconciliation in Canada was effectively a pre-set agenda item for the settlement negotiations through the IRSSA. de Costa and Clark

(2011) point out the challenge of the “malleability” of reconciliation because it “appears to ignore or even to normalize numerous other injustices of colonization – indeed many suggest the very process of reconciliation implies the legitimization of Canadian colonization itself” (p. 326). Others suggest that “the actual work or *process* of reconciliation seems to be less interesting, and less compelling, than that promise of absolution” (Martin, 2009, p. 54, emphasis in original). This context raises concerns about the term reconciliation as it implies that there is a former conciled relationship (Chrisjohn & Wasacase, 2011) to aspire toward, and it begs the questions: can it ever be realized, and who is reconciliation intended for?

With reconciliation efforts in Canada focused on closing the residential school chapter, reconciliation processes are limited to addressing a small part of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. As Corntassel and Holder (2008) note, apologies and truth commissions must address historic and contemporary injustices against Indigenous peoples more broadly, otherwise they are “fundamentally flawed mechanisms for transforming inter-group relations” (p. 466). In a time of “post-modern imperialism,” we see “shape-shifting colonial powers” whom use evolving “instruments of domination” to invent “new methods to erase Indigenous histories and senses of place” (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005, p. 601). Therefore, when apologies or truth and reconciliation commissions are used to the benefit of settler governments to ignore their systems of injustice, they are implicitly designed to disregard the needs of Indigenous peoples (Corntassel & Holder, 2008).

Given that the processes of state reconciliation are controlled by governments, so, too, are the outcomes, which is problematic when the state is fixated on “resolution” and

“forgetting” (Martin, 2009, p. 49). Woolford’s (2004) conceptualization of “reparations as certainty-making” and “reparations as justice-making” (p. 439) makes this clearer. When reparations are pursued with the goal of certainty-making by dominant settler parties, the goal is to impose closure on discussions of colonial injustice and to limit reparations. In this case, reconciliation is achieved, from the perspective of those in power (i.e., the perpetrators), by establishing these limits. As a result, this form avoids the “deep-seated roots of the injustices that have been committed, as these injustices are viewed as too complex to be addressed in a practical or rational manner” (Woolford, 2004, p. 430). Martin (2009), writing specifically about the Canadian context, suggests that our current discourse of reconciliation in the public aims for a resolution, and end to the conflict, but does not talk about responsibility.

Alfred (2009) raises significant concern about the outcomes of reconciliation for Indigenous peoples beyond the scope of the residential school system in which settler governments continue to benefit from colonial injustice and resolutions do not require any further consideration or action. Alfred (2009) very bluntly states: “I see reconciliation as an emasculating concept, weak-kneed and easily accepting of half-hearted measures of a notion of justice that does nothing to help Indigenous peoples regain their dignity and strength” (p. 165). He further states concern about the lack of consideration given to land and compensation:

Without massive restitution made to Indigenous peoples, collectively and as individuals, including land, transfers of federal and provincial funds, and other forms of compensation for past harms and continuing injustices committed

against the land and Indigenous peoples, reconciliation will permanently absolve colonial injustices and is itself a further injustice. (Alfred, 2009, p. 165)

Similarly, Corntassel and Holder (2008) note the limitations of reconciliation when focused on goals of national unity and modernization – which are common in efforts of reconciliation and the narratives that are constructed through it.

While reconciliation is defined by the state to control the processes and outcomes, it also controls narratives which are presented to the nation at large as a tool of and manifestation of this control. Martin (2009) explicitly identifies concerns with this, notably that the “rhetorically persuasive” discourse of reconciliation becomes “less about the well-being of Aboriginal peoples and communities than about freeing non-Native Canadians and their government from the guilt and continued responsibility of knowing their history” (p. 49). Corntassel and Holder (2008) discuss the “dangers of co-opting the language of reconciliation” (p. 486) in the context of truth and reconciliation commissions because they

tend to be premised on the colonial narrative and engage in a ‘politics of distraction’—they shift the discourse away from restitution of indigenous homelands and resources and ground it instead in a political/legal rights-based process that plays into the affirmative repair policies of states and ultimately rewards colonial injustices. (p. 472)

This is particularly evident in an examination of the 2008 federal apology and 1998 *Statement* which both attempted to confine wrongdoings to actions of the past, specifically related to residential schools. Similarly, Alfred (2009) warns of the “pacifying discourse of reconciliation” (p. 166) rooted in lies about the true history of

Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations. Instead, Alfred (2009) advocates for restitution which focuses on land and compensation. Therefore, the rhetoric of reconciliation is problematic, in itself, given the ways that it can limit its own potential.

Henderson and Wakeham (2013), too, note that by celebrating the effort of governments towards reconciliation, they can distract from issues that have yet to be addressed, or those that are ongoing. There is also a tendency to engage a “strategic management of liability” (Wakeham, 2012, p. 3) in which wrongs are framed as being in historical context, rather than acknowledging the systemic and ongoing processes of colonialism (i.e., through official statements, control of legal processes as I described above, etcetera). Like the federal government’s efforts to control the narratives of reconciliation in Canada, the media also plays a role. Wakeham (2012) provides this explanation:

dominant formulations—as articulated by a range of actors, including settler states and mainstream media—have tended to foreclose alternative meanings and co-opt apologies as a strategy of containment, thereby seeking to manage Indigenous calls for social change by substituting rhetorical gestures of atonement for more radical processes of redistributive justice or political power sharing. (p. 2)

Wakeham (2012) offers further analysis when contextualizing Indigenous resistance to colonial frameworks of reconciliation. She describes the consequences of Indigenous struggle as being “framed as obstacles to national healing and threats to national security” (Wakeham, 2012, p. 2), and, “in a remarkable twist of logic, counterterrorism becomes

the counterpart to reconciliation” (p. 7). Indigenous peoples become the threat on their own homeland.

The state’s effort to control the processes, outcomes, and narratives surrounding reconciliation corrupts the ways that Indigenous peoples and the settler state, including its citizens, can envision and participate in reconciliation. While some non-Indigenous peoples acknowledge the intergenerational, cross-societal impacts of residential schooling, and the larger framework of colonialism in contemporary society, reconciliation continues to justify settler colonialism. In the next section, I present academic literature regarding the ways in which reconciliation closes off engagement with settler colonialism.

Reconciliation to Normalize Settler Colonialism

Within reconciliation discourses that normalize and legitimize settler colonialism, the nation-state and its citizens have space to rationalize their settler identities. While this can be connected to controlling the master narrative of Canada as a peaceful nation, as discussed above, it is worth distinguishing the diverse ways that settlers benefit from settler dominated constructions of reconciliation. As Regan (2010) notes, Canada as a country is at a juncture where settlers can decide to “remain colonizer-perpetrators—benign peacemakers—bearing the token gift of false reconciliation” (p. 17), or, settlers can engage in an unsettling process, which includes learning about Canada’s history to take action against contemporary manifestations of colonization. This consciousness-raising has healing potential since Canadian settlers can begin to acknowledge complicity and replace problematic feelings of false innocence (Regan, 2010). However, there is also

concern about the ways that settlers negotiate the feelings which might arise from this work.

Learning about the complicated history, and present, of colonialism in Canada can, and perhaps should, lead settlers to feel unsettled. However, in a problematic twist, feelings of shame, for actions perpetrated by a government, can contribute to nationhood and as a mechanism for reconciliation, as suggested by Ahmed (2005):

so the West takes, then gives, *and in the moment of giving repeats as well as conceals the taking*. The ‘we’ emerges as ‘feeling good’ by ‘feeling bad’ about others, bad feeling that is converted into good feeling only by forgetting that the capacity to give depends on past and present appropriations. (p. 75, emphasis in original)

While settlers can begin to engage in learning about the violent actions of their government, it is precisely through this learning that they continue to benefit from their settler colonial position (i.e., feel good). As Martin (2009) notes, reconciliation has been used in speeches, reports, and in mandates of organizations so that “its connotations of peacemaking and of the setting aside of differences ... become[s] a kind of chant or chorus—an anthem to Canadian identity and ideals” (p. 52). It is through this problematic attempt at reconciliation that settlers take part in further disengagement and denial of their complicity in the colonial project. However, this “feeling good about feeling bad” (Simon, 2013, p. 133) does not only happen at an individual level. As described above, governments use the rhetoric of reconciliation to control national narratives and reaffirm settler colonialism.

While some settlers enter into reconciliation, sometimes in problematic ways, it is more often discussed in the literature as something that is avoided by settlers because of the discomfort it causes (Dion, 2009) and the required unlearning of Euro-Canadian superiority (Battiste, 2013) which involves “a shift in philosophy, beliefs, and assumptions” (Wink, 2005, p. 19). Referring to the formal education context, Lenape-Potawatomi scholar Susan Dion (2009) describes the position of the “perfect stranger” as one in which the “fear of offending, of introducing controversial topics, and of introducing content that challenges [one’s] understanding of the dominant version of Canadian history” (p. 179) keeps settlers from engaging with these matters. Like the perfect stranger, Regan (2010) acknowledges an attempt at neutrality among settlers when she explains that “claiming ignorance is a colonial strategy – a way of proclaiming our ignorance because ‘we did not know’” (Regan, 2010, p. 41). For Barker (2010), the “colonial Settler” (p. 319) does not acknowledge or accept his or her own roles in colonial practices. This refusal is further explained by Dion (2009):

Canadians ‘refuse to know’ that the racism that fuelled colonization sprang from a system that benefits all non-Aboriginal people, not just the European settlers of long ago. This refusal to know is comforting: it supports an understanding of racism as an act of individuals, not of a system. It creates a barrier allowing Canadians to resist confronting the country’s racist past and the extent to which that past lives inside its present, deep in the national psyche. The need to deny racism in Canada’s past resurfaces again and again in its present. (pp. 56-57)

Like the colonial settler, the settler Canadian preoccupation with the peacemaker myth, which Regan (2010) states is the “bedrock of settler identity” (p. 11), leads to the position

of “colonizer perpetrator” (p. 17). This prevents settlers from examining their legacy as colonizers and beneficiaries of colonialism and from avoiding the recognition of their complicity as colonizers in the present. Furthermore, when Canadians come to learn about the colonial context in which the nation exists, there is an expressed desire “for the *end* of the story—or for a new chapter in which colonizer and colonized will be able to start over” (Martin, 2009, p. 53). Or, as Cook (2018) identifies, the “politics of recognition,” like the work of the TRC, “fails to transform settler-colonial relationships not only because it enacts the internalization of colonial recognition but because it fails to account for, or challenge, structural settler denial” (p. 11) as what Cook (2018) calls “structural ignorance” (p. 15). The way in which reconciliation has been framed through apologies, programs, and even the TRC, points to the ways that this chapter in Canadian history is conceived, and ultimately results in shutting down Others.

A final concern, within the intersecting discourses of reconciliation and settler colonialism, is the misuse of language. Tuck & Yang (2012) oppose the all too common “absorption, adoption, and transposing of decolonization” (p. 3) as a metaphor for other social justice frameworks. In this way, “settler moves to innocence” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 10), which are essentially motivated by aims of reconciliation so that settlers are made “commensurable” to Indigenous peoples (p. 36), allows settlers to avoid acknowledging and attending to their own complicity in the ongoing colonial project. Settlers benefit from colonization, and then again, by taking up these approaches to absolve feelings of guilt.

Like the ways that reconciliation is used by the government to control both Indigenous and non-Indigenous participation, settlers further use reconciliation to settle

their settler colonial identity. Settlers draw from positions of denial, not knowing, or even embrace celebratory reconciliation activities to avoid understanding their ongoing complicity in settler colonial structures that continue to benefit non-Indigenous peoples. In the next section, I draw from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars who speak to a more transformational process of reconciliation.

What Reconciliation Could Be

While much of the literature discussed in this review is critical of the ways that the term reconciliation is used, there are also two important ways in which it *could* be used to benefit Indigenous peoples. First, much of this literature references reconciliation in terms of Indigenous self-determination and community well-being beyond the scope of the residential school system. Second, the term is referenced in ways that emphasize the process of reconciliation instead of focusing on how it is a destination that Canadians and the nation should advance toward.

Reconciliation is often described as being something to aspire toward as Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples come together in respectful relationships. Mussell (2008) identifies further work necessary for reconciliation, including the “restoration of Indigenous languages, cultures, social structures, and traditional institutions for governance” (p. 322). In all these instances of cultural and linguistic regeneration, reconciliation efforts move beyond the scope of the residential school system to address the larger colonial project and its impacts on Indigenous peoples and communities. While problematic for the nation-state that only wishes for stability and closure, reparations as justice-making takes up reconciliation as “a process of ongoing engagement with the other” (Woolford, 2004, p. 431), which does not rely on a goal of

finality or conclusion. Put another way, “reconciliation is conceptualized not as an endpoint but as an ever-deepening process with stages or degrees of relational change” (Nagy, 2017, p. 314). Furthermore, the processes of reconciliation will also take place among multiple stakeholders, “between individuals, within communities or between conflicting groups, such as the victims and beneficiaries of oppressive violence” (Nagy, 2012, p. 351).

Acknowledging that reconciliation can hold potential, the initiatives to get to reconciliation must include truth:

Many Canadians want to see reconciliation between the settlers and Indigenous peoples. But that cannot be forced. Reconciliation has to pass first through truth.

And we still have not had enough of that from this government or from Canada as a whole. (Manuel & Derrickson, 2017, p. 56)

However, there is an inherent contradiction of colonialism that challenges this truth as the nation likes to represent it. RCAP (1996a) identified the importance of truth and accepting truth:

But as Aboriginal people have told us, the past might be forgiven but it cannot be forgotten. It infuses the present and gives shape to Canadian institutions, attitudes and practices that seriously impede their aspirations to assume their rightful place in a renewed Canadian federation. Only if Canada admits to the fundamental contradiction of continuing colonialism, they assert, can true healing and true reconciliation take place. (p. 581)

Beyond truth, however, reconciliation must also include “healing, justice, institutional reform and reparation, all of which interlock in complex, sometimes conflicting, and

context-specific ways” (Nagy, 2012, p. 351). Reconciliation requires sophisticated consideration of, firstly, the needs of Indigenous peoples, and, secondly, how to bring the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples together in a way that respects the complicated past.

Instead of understanding that reconciliation is an ongoing process that might never be achieved, I suggest that, perhaps, we are “reconciling” or engaging in “reconciliatory work.” Tuck and Yang (2012) present an “ethic of incommensurability” that requires “relinquishing settler futurity, abandoning the hope that settlers may one day be commensurable to Native peoples” (p. 36). Wakeham (2012) also points out criticism of the term reconciliation:

Some of these alternative versions of colonial reckoning would like to reclaim the name of ‘reconciliation,’ while others would eschew this category entirely, arguing that it is too freighted with historical, theological, and ideological resonances and that other words such as ‘reparations,’ ‘redress,’ and ‘restitution’ would serve the purpose better. (p. 24)

While reconciliation is described in diverse ways, not only in the academic community, it is now part of Canadian vernacular and a word that will continue to be discussed, debated, critiqued, and used in a variety of ways.

The possibilities of what reconciliation *could* be speaks to the immediate and long-term needs of Indigenous peoples and communities. These considerations talk back to the focus of reconciliation in the preceding sections where I describe how the state constructs reconciliation so that it controls the processes, outcomes, and narratives derived from the process. In this way, settlers construct reconciliation in ways that

normalize settler colonialism instead of disrupting it (Cook, 2018). Finally, Tuck and Yang's (2012) ethic of incommensurability speaks to the impossibility of reconciliation in Canada, which lends itself to understanding reconciliation as a process instead of a clear, definable destination.

Summary

Following the publicity of residential school survivors' experiences of abuse and the Oka Crisis in the early 1990s, reconciliation started to be used in public discourse, most notably in the final report from RCAP. James (2017b) draws a distinction between the 2008 apology from then Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, and substantive action. Further, he acknowledges that the apology added to the official narrative about residential schooling beyond the 1998 *Statement*, but it "did not seem to lead to any corresponding transformation in Canada's engagement with Indigenous peoples" (James, 2017b, p. 8). Through negotiations, the IRSSA established the framework of the TRC which currently serves as a vital signpost in the national journey of reconciliation in Canada. As a source of public education (Cook, 2018), the TRC is raising awareness about the residential school system and its broader legacy – most notably, that it was a form of "cultural genocide" (TRC, 2015e, p. 1). The TRC's work also broadens into child welfare, treaty, justice, and health. The 94 Calls to Action provide a robust guide for what reconciliation should involve in Canada and is focused on substantive action at all levels of government and in the everyday lives of Canadians.

Given that the term reconciliation has proliferated since the TRC (Robinson, 2015), it is not a surprise that it is viewed by some to be "controversial" (Vowel, 2016, p. 174). Clark, de Costa, and Maddison (2016) recognize that the capacity to debate the

meaning of reconciliation remains an important effort. I am interested in how reconciliation is defined, understood, and practiced in local settings to contribute to the overall schema of reconciliation in Canada. As this literature review has shown, there is much diversity across time, space, and social location regarding what reconciliation might mean. By understanding it in a localized context, reconciliation activities can provide direction for approaches toward sustained individual transformation and action, provide a valuable contribution to the discourses surrounding the concept of reconciliation, uncover the issues and implications of a TRC event, and serve to increase the effectiveness of concrete strategies deployed in a post-TRC era.

Conclusion

Mapping the evolution of reconciliation as a national discourse in Canada, starting with RCAP, through to the efforts of the TRC, and into the academic literature, this review of the literature speaks to the diversity of perspectives interested in reconciliation as both “symbolic” and “substantive” (Clark, de Costa, & Maddison, 2016, p. 2). While not all voices can be discussed in this dissertation, I believe it is important to outline multiple perspectives from significant points in time related to the Canadian context. By doing so, this review also speaks to the way that reconciliation in Canada is often focused on, and purposefully contained to, the issue of residential schools, to avoid issues of settler colonialism (Cook, 2018; Corntassel & Holder, 2008; Henderson & Wakeham, 2009).

In the next chapter, I present the methodological choices that framed this research project. I discuss the alignment between the paradigms informing this research, the

methodological choices, and specific methods. I also provide details of how the research was carried out in addition to some of the ethical considerations I encountered.

Chapter Four: Methodology and Research Design

This research represents an example of an instrumental case study wherein the case itself is secondary to the understanding of another issue (Stake, 2005). For example, I examined a localized event inspired by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) (e.g., the case) and gained insight into the understandings, tensions, and possibilities of reconciliatory work among a group of educators. I also uncovered how reconciliation is conceptualized by coordinated efforts of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in grassroots and institutional formations. Therefore, the case was my entry point for better understanding broader issues about what reconciliation might mean as it is negotiated in practice by Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples within Canadian society.

This instrumental case study was examined with narrative inquiry as the framing methodology. The event under study, in which all participants were involved as either organizers, presenters, or attendees, served as a culminating focal point and segue for participants narrating other life experiences. These fulsome personal accounts are consistent with what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) write about narrative inquiry when they suggest it is a “reconstruction of a person’s experience in relation to others and to a social milieu” (p. 39). For this research study, I chose to collect narrative data through conversational interviews.

As Kovach (2009) states, “it is rare that qualitative research ... does not make mention of the self-reflective component in its methodology” (p. 33), which can then be extended to a process of reflexivity whereby one intentionally examines their initial recorded observations. Therefore, in addition to gathering the views of others, I

consistently maintained a process of reflection in which I documented, through journals and reflective notetaking, the process of conducting this research and my learning about myself as a settler in Canada. This technique served as a valuable tool for me to glean insights from my labours as a scholar and researcher while focusing on a topic of interest and one in which I am implicated that includes reconciliation and/or with Indigenous peoples. I share more about this method below and I present my insights gleaned from this process in the epilogue.

In this chapter, I outline my rationale for engaging with qualitative research through the lens of decolonization where I have selected narrative inquiry as the overarching methodology. I then describe how I understand decolonizing methodologies and how they are relevant to this research study. I also include a brief section on a few elements informed by Indigenous research paradigms that I use to frame my decolonizing approach. Next, I describe narrative inquiry and its alignment with the relational framework delineated in chapter two. I then outline the methods involved with this study: self-reflexivity and conversational interviews. Finally, I explain the approach to analysis and the ethical considerations I encountered during this research study.

Qualitative Research and the Truth About Stories

Cherokee and Greek author Thomas King (2003) has said that “the truth about stories is that that’s all we are” (p. 32). Even before hearing this phrase in a literature course in university, I was known as a storyteller and affectionately nicknamed “Dr. Watson” at summer camp. I agree with Connelly and Clandinin (1990) when they state that “people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives” (p. 2). We are in a constant cycle of experiencing and then telling stories of those experiences.

Respecting the nature of qualitative research, I acknowledge that my perspectives are weaved throughout this dissertation and the conclusions I draw are significantly influenced by my own experiences (Kovach, 2009). Like Riessman (2008), I use the concepts story and narrative interchangeably to refer to my use of “stories told by research participants (which are themselves interpretive)” (p. 6). Through listening, careful review, and analysis of the stories shared by the participants in this research, along with stories I shared in our conversations, the ideas coalesced into the findings produced in this dissertation.

Decolonizing Methodologies

The following often-quoted line from Smith’s (2012) influential text, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, succinctly describes Indigenous peoples’ relationship to research and appropriately sets the context for this section: “[the term] ‘research,’ is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary” (p. 1). Vital to understanding this quote is the recognition of the “cognitive frameworks of imperialism and colonialism” (Battiste, Bell, & Findlay, 2002, p. 82), rooted in Euro-Western values, that continue to “ignore” and “erode” other ways of knowing, with the ultimate goal of destroying these knowledge systems (Battiste, 2013, p. 104). Decolonizing research calls on the researcher to self-reflexively interrupt cognitive imperialism (Battiste, 1986) and commit oneself to social action (Kovach, 2009) to disrupt the structures of settler colonialism. Consequently, researchers need to proactively actuate their self-decolonizing cognitive labour, and must place an emphasis on establishing (or continuing) relationships with Indigenous peoples that are meaningful, longstanding, ethical, and

highly responsive to Indigenous community needs (B. Debassige, personal communication, February 8, 2020).

With no standard approach or definition (Fortier, 2017), some scholars consider decolonizing methodologies to be within qualitative inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Kovach, 2009), while others resist this alignment (Smith, 2012; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Kovach (2009) suggests that by using theory to decolonize, it serves to centre epistemology and reflect a critical theoretical basis to align it with qualitative research. I use decolonizing methodologies within, not as, qualitative research, and in a critical way. I align with Kovach (2009) who writes that “it is possible to situate decolonizing methodologies as falling under the umbrella of an Indigenous research framework, but given its critical theoretical basis, it is more aligned with Western critical research methodologies” (p. 80). As a non-Indigenous person, this assertion is important to my work because centring Indigenous epistemologies is what differentiates Indigenous research from Western methodologies, and without an Indigenous epistemology, I cannot wholly adopt an Indigenous research paradigm (Kovach, 2009).

There is little debate that Indigenous research is distinctive from Western research (Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). As Lavallée (2009) asserts, “it is important that Indigenous ways of knowing resist being categorized under Western concepts, including qualitative inquiry. Indigenous research is not qualitative inquiry; however, the methods used may be qualitative” (p. 36). While my research has been informed by principles of Indigenous research paradigms, like Carlson (2017), “claiming an Indigenous research methodology does not feel like an ethical fit for me. Settler scholars like myself, therefore, require methodological options for conducting appropriate and

decolonizing research that do not rely on attempting to implement Indigenous research methodologies” (p. 498). Therefore, I have selected a qualitative methodology, narrative inquiry, to use alongside decolonizing methodologies.

Tuck and Yang (2012) take a comprehensive view of colonization when they state that “settler colonialism and its decolonization implicates and unsettles everyone” (p. 7). In order to ethically engage with Indigenous participants, and the circumstances central to their life in Canada today (i.e., residential schools, colonization, oppression), I am committed to incorporating Indigenous perspectives in a respectful and ethical way. In the next section, I share some of the elements of Indigenous research paradigms that have informed this research study. Furthermore, I have developed this project based on calls by Indigenous peoples and groups to strengthen the relationship between Indigenous and settler peoples (see Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996a; TRC, 2015c). Finally, I demonstrate how theory and methodology located within the critical paradigm can be used to facilitate decolonizing work.

Indigenous Research Paradigms

The study of decolonizing methodologies invariably leads scholars to consider elements of Indigenous research paradigms. As Held (2019) states, “to decolonize research paradigms and methodologies is to include Indigenous ways of knowing in academia, that is, to teach them, to use them in research, to value them as equal to Western approaches to knowing and to creating knowledge” (p. 2). While there are inherent challenges to non-Indigenous peoples integrating these perspectives (Held, 2019), most obviously that Indigenous research paradigms are rooted in Indigenous worldviews (Wilson, 2008), I agree with Fortier (2017) when he states that “the ability to

take guidance from and to respect the knowledge that Indigenous peoples have offered settlers seeking to live in a good relationship on these territories seems critical to any discussion of decolonization in settler colonial states” (p. 32). To mitigate against any unintended (or inappropriate) use of knowledge offered by Indigenous peoples, I respectfully and ethically incorporate concepts into my own understanding, credit where this knowledge originates, accept and seek guidance from Indigenous peoples, and always accept complete responsibility when I get it wrong. Moreover, in those erroneous instances, when possible, I make a concerted effort to seek advice on producing reparations. At the time of this publication, many of these learnings were gleaned from my lifelong learning on this topic, including extensive feedback and critically engaged discussions with a member of the Indigenous community on my dissertation and during other scholarly activities (i.e., from my doctoral supervisor) (Carlson, 2017). Currently, achieving these personal and professional ethical outcomes remain aspirational goals in everything that I do.

Self-determination is a crucial priority for Indigenous peoples around the world. For Smith (2012), self-determination is at the centre of the Indigenous research agenda which includes a focus on “social justice” (p. 120). Smith (2012) also relates self-determination to the production of knowledge:

the struggle for self-determination has involved questions relating to our history as indigenous peoples and a critique of how we, as the Other, have been represented or excluded from various accounts. Every issue has been approached by indigenous peoples with a view to *rewriting* and *rerighting* our position in history. (p. 29, emphasis in original)

Bishop (2005) centres self-determination in the Kaupapa Māori approach to research. This community specific approach to research is significant because it challenges pan-Indigenization, whereby all Indigenous peoples and cultures are lumped into a homogenous group. Kovach (2009) also speaks about the importance of “tribal-based methodologies” (p. 13) and knowledges from her position as a Nêhiyaw and Saulteaux person. As a non-Indigenous person on Turtle Island, I acknowledge the traditional territories upon which I live and work, that is the Anishinaabe (Ontario, 2019), and where I attend school, the Anishinabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak, and Attawandaron (Western University, no date). This aligns with Carlson’s (2017) principles of anti-colonial methodology related to accountability to Indigenous peoples and land – so that one can “engage with indigeneity and Indigenous people respectfully, learning and observing context-specific cultural norms, protocols, and languages” (p. 501). While land acknowledgements have been criticized for being devoid of material change for Indigenous peoples (Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, 2019; Tuck & Yang, 2012), I suggest that they are a starting point for non-Indigenous peoples to recognize that they are on Indigenous peoples’ land and as settlers are the beneficiary of treaties.⁹

Wilson (2008) writes about an Indigenous research paradigm—the “Indigenous way of doing and being in the research process” (p. 19)—which is based on relationality. To support Indigenous research, one’s cultural protocols, values, and behaviours are

⁹ While not all land in Canada has been ceded through treaty, the Two Row Wampum shared between the Haudenosaunee and the Dutch in 1613, and the Treaty of Niagara between the Crown and numerous nations in 1764, represent the nation-to-nation intent of treaty-making which settler people are party to. Please see Borrows (1997) for further explanation.

“‘factors’ to be built into research explicitly, to be thought about reflexively, to be declared openly as part of the research design” (Smith, 2012, p. 16). Wilson (2008) writes that in an Indigenous paradigm, “all things are related and therefore relevant” (p. 58), and for Kovach (2009), “Indigenous epistemologies live within a relational web” (p. 57). By selecting conversational interviews, which I discuss below, I intentionally sought an approach which would allow me to develop more meaningful relationships with the people involved in this study. I have further considered the way I am in relation to the content of this dissertation based on my settler identity and the ways I am implicated in the structures of colonialism I benefit from.

Although I cannot fully adopt an Indigenous research paradigm, there are components that have informed some of the choices I made in this research study. For example, I have pursued a mainstream methodology (i.e., narrative inquiry) that has demonstrated promise for being in alignment with the principles and values of Indigenous research paradigms (Kovach, 2009). Given that narrative inquiry “often critiques cultural discourses, institutions, organizations, and interactions that produce social inequalities” (Chase, 2011, p. 430), it also aligns with the decolonizing approach for this research.

Narrative Inquiry

As a methodology of qualitative research, narrative inquiry “revolves around an interest in life experiences as narrated by those who live them” (Chase, 2011, p. 421). Narrative is a “distinct form of discourse” that creates meaning through the “shaping or ordering of experience” (Chase, 2011, p. 421). The stories shared in narrative inquiries are embedded in relationships and social structures that are extensions of the narrator’s cultural location (Kovach, 2009; Maynes, Pierce & Laslett, 2008). Sto:lo researcher

Joanne Archibald (2008) states that “stories have the power to make our hearts, minds, bodies, and spirits work together” (p. 12). Kovach (2009), too, asserts that “stories are who we are ... Stories spring forth from a holistic epistemology and are the relational glue in a socially interdependent knowledge system” (p. 108). Here, both recognize the interrelationships that inform the storying process and the underlying knowledge systems that inform their experiences and perspectives as Indigenous scholars.

The philosophical foundation of narrative inquiry informing this study is situated in a Deweyan theory of experience drawing on interaction and continuity (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) note that “for Dewey, experience is both personal and social. Both the personal and the social are always present. People are individuals and need to be understood as such, but they cannot be understood only as individuals” (p. 2). Interaction acknowledges the ways that individuals “are always in relation, always in a social context” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2). Dewey’s other important contribution to the theory of experience is continuity: “experiences do not simply appear to be connected through time; they are continuous” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 40). Writing from their perspectives as Indigenous scholars, Smith (2012) and Graveline (1998) point out that the colonial conceptualization of time is linear. Similarly, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) note the temporal component of narrative inquiry in which the past, present, and future are important considerations. Embracing Indigenous perceptions of time, Saulis (1994) states that “time has a physical, emotional and spiritual dimension” (as cited in Graveline, 1998, p. 140). In this research study, I supported a holistic, circular notion of time that envisioned my own and my participants’ experiences informing each other as we returned to previous encounters (i.e., the event and other

associated occurrences) through our interactions with each other. Participants were free to move back and forth to topics as they emerged, and I also supported their integration of experiences in the past, present, and future. No content was off limits.

Methodological Alignment with Theory

The relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada is of personal interest to me and undergirds my rationale for basing this research in the critical paradigm, as described in chapter two. Moreover, my choice of methodology converges with my choice of theories (i.e., critical race theory, tribalcrit, and decolonizing theory). Chase (2011) conveys the alignment between narrative inquiry and critical research as follows: “narrative researchers continue to be compelled by the relationship between their work and possibilities for change and social justice. Some study how narratives make change happen, and some collect and present narrative to make change happen” (p. 427). It is within the second context that I understand this research study.

Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) note a borderland between narrative inquiry and critical theory in their exploration of the “philosophical territory” (p. 57) surrounding this methodology. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) critique Marxism, as a foundational philosophy of critical theory, on account of their interpretation of critical theory, that it disregards individual experiences as legitimate sources of knowledge. However, they do identify three ways that narrative inquiry can contribute to addressing oppressive conditions. These include promoting social justice as a condition of narrative inquiry (e.g., projects that investigate oppression, support agency of marginalized peoples), including voices that express experiences of oppression, and consulting with scholars in other disciplines to constructively critique narrative practices (Clandinin & Rosiek,

2007). In my narrative work, I have considered the oppressive forces informing the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples while letting participants' stories speak for themselves, in so far as I have included narrative accounts from the conversational interviews as they were shared with me (i.e., interview material not reconstituted into a new narrative).

As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) note, “narrative inquiries are always strongly autobiographical. Our research interests come out of our own narratives of experience and shape our narrative inquiry plotlines” (p. 121). Embracing the transformative potential of decolonizing theory (Lowman & Barker, 2015), and aligned with the way that personal story is weaved in narrative inquiry, I have engaged in reflexivity on the research process and my understanding of my identity as a settler. In the next section, I discuss the method of reflexivity in this study.

Reflexivity as Method

The method of reflexivity as a part of qualitative research emphasizes “the importance of self-awareness, political/cultural consciousness, and ownership of one’s perspective” (Patton, 2002, p. 64). However, the use of reflexivity as simply recognizing one’s positionality, like I shared in the prologue, is critiqued by critical race scholars Emirbayer and Desmond (2012) and Moore (2012) as not being critical enough to contribute to the extinguishment of racism in research. However, in order to engage with meaningful reflexivity, and move beyond simple reflection on and communication of one’s positionality, one must confront “unsettling stories” (Regan, 2010, p. 51) which emerge from listening to others with respect and consideration of how one is in relation (i.e., power and privilege) to the stories.

The concept of unsettling is critical for my project to understand how unsettling can manifest in public education opportunities, and in decolonizing myself as a researcher and as a settler-Canadian. Like Kobayashi (2003), I believe that “reflexivity has no meaning if it is not connected to a larger agenda—which for most of us is avowedly both political and personal—meant to change the world” (p. 348). Therefore, my use of reflexivity is not only to interrogate my privilege, but as a means for engagement with social change. Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2011) note that reflexivity forces us to come to terms not only with our choice of research problem and with those with whom we engage in the research process, but with ourselves and with the multiple identities that represent the fluid self in the research setting. (p. 124)

To support my exploration of relationship with Indigenous peoples, in and beyond the context of the specific event upon which this research is based, reflexivity is an important component of my research journey.

Reflectivity has helped me to better understand my choice of research problem (Kovach, 2009) and has explicated my identities in the research setting (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). I have also used this method to actively engage with decolonizing my own understanding around reconciliatory research and action. The stories told by the participants, in which I have acted as a listener, have joined with reflexivity to allow me to openly consider the conclusions I have come to and the lessons I have learned from my own perspective (Wilson, 2008). This took place through a process of reflecting on reflections which were recorded in journaling exercises and are also expressed in my writing throughout this dissertation.

As a component of any qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Kovach, 2009; Patton, 2002), I have inserted myself into the research process. I have tried to be very open, explicit, and responsive to opportunities to consider how I have engaged with the research and my settler positionality. My approach has included engagement in relevant, meaningful conversation with participants as guided by my research question: how do I make meaning of reconciliation and what are my roles and responsibilities as a settler Canadian in reconciliatory activities with Indigenous peoples?

I started the process of reflexivity by journaling and engaging in reflective notetaking. Often following a lecture or event that I attended related to Indigenous-settler relations, after a research interview, or while transcribing an interview, I audio recorded or wrote journal entries about my learning, questions I had, or other observations. While these journals were not used explicitly as data for analyzing the first two research questions, I reflected on them, along with my tacit assumptions about the research process while writing the dissertation, to respond to the third research question regarding my role in reconciliation, which I share in the epilogue. The epilogue encapsulates my personal growth and development as a scholar and represents a commitment to my continuing learning about my roles and responsibilities as a settler.

Conversational Interviews

Interviews are a common method used in narrative inquiry (Chase, 2011; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Maynes, Pierce, & Laslett, 2008; Riessman, 2008) to gather information that the researcher cannot directly observe themselves (Patton, 2002). The interview is a flexible tool (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011) that helps the researcher access their participants' perspectives and experiences (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015;

Patton, 2002). A structured interview approach is uncommon in narrative inquiry and was not appropriate for this project because it limits relationality between the researcher and participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Instead, I combined a conversational interview approach (Kovach, 2009; Patton, 2002) with the use of an interview guide (Patton, 2002).

While the interview guide helped me to stay focused on my topic, I remained conscious of the need to foster conversation in the interviews (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2002; Patton, 2002; Riessman, 2008). Patton (2002) notes that the interview guide outlines issues and topics in advance and allows the interviewer to freely explore, probe, and ask questions on the research topic. Thus, in my interviews, I aimed to elicit responses about reconciliation in the context of the event, and beyond, and posed direct and probing questions to help prompt memories. Throughout the interviews, both the participants and I recalled memories, discussed current events, shared teaching resources, among other relevant topics, as we engaged in meaningful conversation. Archibald (2008) suggests that “research as conversation [can be] characterized as an open-ended interview with opportunity for both sides to engage in talk rather than only one party doing most of the talking” (p. 47). One affirming example in the success of this interview approach became evident when one of my participants, Ethan,¹⁰ stated, “I don’t know whether you realize it or not, but you’ve actually told me a great deal about you.” Kovach (2009) writes about this engagement between researcher and participant as co-creating knowledge:

¹⁰ A pseudonym.

In co-creating knowledge, story is not only a means for hearing another's narrative, it also invites reflexivity into research. Through reflexive story there is opportunity to express the researcher's inward knowing. Sharing one's own story is an aspect of co-constructing knowledge from an Indigenous perspective. (p. 100)

My approach in the interviews displayed a cultural responsiveness that included remaining mindful of the principles embedded within Indigenous research, particularly relationality.

Participant Recruitment

My interest in Indigenous/non-Indigenous relations led me to attend the TRC-inspired event that is the focus of this research project as a learner and an educator. After the event concluded, I conducted preliminary conversations with members of the organizing committee who expressed interest in learning more about conference participants' retrospective reflections on the event. During these conversations, one of the organizers offered to serve as my main contact person and intermediary in sending recruitment emails to the other organizing committee members, presenters, and attendees. Before proceeding with the research study, I completed the ethical approval process through the Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (WNMREB) (Appendix A).

My contact forwarded separate recruitment emails with a scripted invitation attachment to members of the organizing committee and to the presenters in April 2017. A separate email following the same protocol was sent to the attendee list in August 2017. I was carbon copied on the email messages and those who were interested in

participating were asked to reply to me directly. Upon receipt of responses indicating interest, I shared a copy of the Letter of Information and Informed Consent (Appendix B) and distributed a list of interview themes (Appendix C). Through email correspondence, six organizers responded to the email, and three of those six individuals asked if they could be interviewed together. After I received ethical approval from WNMREB for the change, I conducted a small group interview with the three participants and followed the same conversational approach used in the one-on-one interviews (please see Appendix D for Letter of Information and Informed Consent for this group). During this group interview, the participants mentioned an individual who served as part of the organizing committee but did not receive the recruitment email message. Since I could not personally reach out to the individual because of the research ethics protocol, I suggested to the group that this person could contact me directly if they wanted to participate. This person did message me, and we coordinated an interview. In total, I interviewed seven organizers over a series of four interviews plus one interview with three people. For the presenters, I conducted four interviews, and, for the attendees, I received eleven responses with five agreeing to be interviewed. The other six attendees did not respond to my email request to coordinate an interview.

Data Sources

In-person interviews were held in Southern Ontario at locations of the participant's own choosing. Additionally, two interviews were conducted by telephone: one a presenter and one attendee. After I ensured participants understood the Letter of Information and signed the Informed Consent form, I digitally recorded each interview.

To clarify issues and assist with probing questions *in situ*, I also recorded written notes during the interviews.

After each interview was complete, I transcribed the audio recordings in the order that I conducted them (organizers and presenters, and then attendees). Transcribing the interviews assisted me in becoming familiar with the interview content and facilitated my analysis of the findings. After each interview was transcribed, I returned a copy to the participant for a member check (Kovach, 2009) by secure electronic transfer. The member check provided each participant with an opportunity to clarify issues and increased accuracy of the data. In the end, only a few participants responded with edits, some with a brief remark on the transcript of the interview (i.e., how they spoke: chopped up, disconnected thoughts, etcetera), and one participant self-chose a pseudonym. I selected names for the remainder of the participants.

Analysis of the Findings

I initially planned to gather storied accounts from the research participants that would constitute the narratives for this inquiry, given that I did not have the intention of writing new narratives based on content from the interviews (Burm, 2016) or reconstitute interview content into a new narrative (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Riessman, 1993). However, through the course of the interviews, I realized that participants did not have long, full stories to share; instead, my interview questions often elicited snippets of ideas, experiences, and concerns regarding reconciliation. Nonetheless, I chose to leave their voices intact (i.e., taking the “response as a complete narrative;” Graham-Marrs, 2011, p. 94) to respect the participants’ words as they were shared with me. With this approach, I

am using the phrase narrative to indicate the snippets and longer stories that responded to my questions about reconciliation. Thus, my approach acknowledges that

stories told in research interviews are rarely so bounded, and locating them is often a complex interpretive process. Where one chooses to begin and end a narrative can profoundly alter its shape and meaning. Decisions underscore how deeply the listener/interpreter is part of the text. (Riessman, 1993, p. 18)

The narratives I have selected and the choices I made in my editing of the texts for clarity, are also implicated in my interpretive process.

In narrative inquiry, researchers do not concern themselves with determining if the accounts shared by narrators are precise reiterations of actual events (Chase, 2011) and are instead interested in understanding “the meanings people attach to those events” (p. 424). According to Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2011), trustworthiness in the critical paradigm is established “when research creates action ... which creates the capacity for positive social change and emancipatory community action” (p. 114). I have assessed the quality of my study based on the ways in which it can raise awareness about the meaning of reconciliatory work by those who read my work.¹¹ Furthermore, aligned with critical change criteria (Patton, 2002), my work maintains a critical perspective on the power imbalances and oppression that exists in Canadian society.

Process for Analyzing Interview Data

A common concern of narrative inquiry is the way that qualitative analysis can “fracture ... texts in the service of interpretation and generalization by taking bits and

¹¹ This dissertation will be published in Western University’s open access Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository.

pieces, snippets of a response edited out of context” (Riessman, 1993, p. 3). Given that Indigenous peoples’ knowledges have often been misrepresented in research (Smith, 2012), I have been conscious of my process for analyzing the data. I used open coding (Patton, 2002) through what Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) call “data-driven” coding (p. 202) where I used the data itself as a source for my codes (Morgan, 1993). I understand codes to refer to “labels that assign symbolic meaning” to data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014, p. 71). Like my decision to personally transcribe the interviews, which lends to a level of analysis in the transcription process (Tilley, 2003), I chose to code “by hand” in which I used highlighters, pens, and sticky notes applied directly to the written text. I printed out a copy of the transcripts and identified descriptive codes (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014) based on reoccurring concepts or phrases in the left margin of the document. During a second reading of the transcripts (for the purposes of analysis – I had already read through them a number of times for transcription), I used coloured sticky notes to start to group the codes together; one colour was used for content related to the event itself, while another was used for content about reconciliation. In some cases, two colours were applied to the same datum. At this point, I started recording the second cycle codes (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014) in a notebook so that I could identify relationships between them. For example, when reading about the organizers’ roles, some initial categories included phrases such as “learning from planning” which included initial codes such as: “time,” “skill development,” and “committee.” Later this “learning from planning” category transformed into “personal learning” and “incident.”

After establishing categories, I reviewed the transcripts repeatedly to ensure that the categories accurately and effectively encapsulated the diverse and plentiful codes

from the first reading. By reading through the transcripts multiple times, through the transcription process and analysis, themes (Patton, 2002) were uncovered through re-reading, combining, and mapping out the categories. In the end, I identified two overarching themes that provided insight on my first two research questions. Those themes are (1) reconciliation is difficult work; and (2) reconciliation requires action.

Ethical Considerations

Qualitative research and its interpretive nature (Creswell, 2007; Kovach, 2009) carries the potential to pose ethical dilemmas. As a settler researching a topic related to Indigenous experiences, there are ethical considerations associated with this tension, in addition to other more typical ethics matters in any research process. As a doctoral student in a Western, Eurocentric institution, this research has been guided by ethical protocols of this paradigm. I have been guided by the WNMREB and the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2)* (2014). I have ensured participants were provided informed consent and offered privacy and confidentiality. In addition to these concepts, I have also been cognisant of Indigenous ethical protocols (Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008).

Research is part of the colonial process because it defines who is worthy of determining knowledge and what can be deemed as legitimate knowledge (Smith, 2012). Reyes Cruz (2008) raises important questions about decolonizing knowledge, such as, “who gets to claim knowledge, how knowledge is claimed, and how is one to go about gaining knowledge” (p. 651). I have chosen narrative research to help negotiate some of these tensions. Archibald (2008) notes that

Indigenous stories have lost much educational and social value due to colonization, which resulted in weak translations from Aboriginal languages to English, stories shaped to fit a Western literate form, and stories adapted to fit a predominantly Western education system. (p. 7)

While I have asked participants to share stories in English, I did my best to be conscious of other ways of sharing story (i.e., non-linear stories, use of traditional language words, etcetera). I am also very aware of the responsibility of story. Kovach (2009) provides this warning: “Story as methodology is decolonizing research ... Thus the stories, and the content that they carry, must be shared with this appreciation to protect them from exploitation or appropriation” (p. 103). I am aware of the power I have in recording, interpreting, and presenting the stories others have shared with me. There is also an added layer of power in which I, from my settler background, have asked Indigenous participants to share their stories with me.

In the early conceptualization of this project, I considered the role of ethical approval in Indigenous communities. The *TCPS2* (2014) includes a chapter on research with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples that served as a highly useful resource and guide for my study. Because my research did not engage with a specific Indigenous community from whom I could seek ethical approval, I only fulfilled the requirements from the WNMREB. However, I always remained cognisant of the ethical implications of the research relationship between myself, as a white, female, doctoral student, and my participants, some of whom identified as Indigenous.

While fraught with logistical difficulties, offering the participants the opportunity to review the interview transcripts through member checking was important to me.

According to Chase (2011),

because narrative researchers do not know in advance exactly how they will use the narratives they collect, they should return to narrators to inform them – and ask again for permission to use their stories – when they *do* know how they plan to present, public, or perform the work. (p. 424, emphasis in original)

While no further communication was possible after transcripts were returned, I was able to offer the single opportunity for participants to review them. Ideally, more continuous engagement with participants in reviewing their narratives would increase the application of relational accountability advocated for in Western conceptualized narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and in Indigenous research paradigms (Wilson, 2008).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I shared the philosophical tenets of the methodologies and technical details of the methods informing this qualitative research study. I have also described the approach used to identify themes in the interview data, and shared ethical considerations in the research process. In the next chapter, I present the findings of this research study. The first overarching finding, “reconciliation as difficult work” reports on challenges the organizing committee faced in preparing and presenting the event, and among all the participants and their engagement with reconciliation in everyday life. The second theme shares the participants’ narratives around the importance of reconciliation through action, including in education and through relationship building.

Chapter Five: Findings and Analysis

Introduction

In this chapter, I present and analyze the findings from the conversational interviews. The following overarching research questions informed my thematic narrative analysis: (a) how do participants understand reconciliation; and, (b) how are they using what they learned from the event in their personal and professional lives? Despite being prompted, participants did not focus on specific learning gained from participating in the event, and, to be precise, spoke very little about the event itself. Instead, the conversational interviews elicited what participants knew about reconciliation generally. They relied on sharing other experiences and examples from their personal lives, professional lives, and from other contexts. Among the non-Indigenous participants, they acknowledged that the event was only one piece of their larger effort to engage in learning about Indigenous peoples.

I initiated the interview process by speaking with the organizers who agreed to participate so that I could gather background information about the event. In conversation with these organizers, I uncovered how the event originated, what the intended goals were, who the target audience was, their experiences and occurrences throughout the day, and other details concerning event planning and coordination. The interviews produced responses about the organizers' personal and/or other professional relationships in work with or as Indigenous peoples. Among presenters, the conversations included content about their presentation, with less discussion of the event overall, and their personal and professional interests in reconciliation. The interviews with people who attended the event, all self-identified educators, resulted in discussion about experiences and

occurrences at the event, but mostly their work in schools, communities, and with their families.

Chapter Overview

In the next section of this chapter, I provide an outline of the three participant groups and include a table containing basic demographic information. I then present the data findings and analysis that originated from the interview data. Through a narrative thematic analysis of the interview transcripts, I uncovered two overarching themes: reconciliation is difficult work and reconciliation requires action. To assist with clarity and to enhance readability of the texts, I completed some light editing of the direct quotations, but I maintain the substance, meaning, and intent of their words.

In my presentation of the findings and analysis, I share the participants' voices regarding the two themes that I uncovered in the interview transcripts. First, I present participants' narratives about the difficulties of understanding and actualizing reconciliation in Canada. These difficulties were related to personal discomfort, the challenges of bringing together Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, and the institutionalization of colonialism. Next, I report on the theme of action for reconciliation through education and relationship building. For education, participants expressed their desire to have mandatory learning about Indigenous peoples across the education system, they noted the power of language, and the importance of including Indigenous voices and perspectives. Through relationship building, participants acknowledged that building community connections and caring for people are vital components for engaging in reconciliation. In the concluding section, I pose the question, who is reconciliation for?

Description of Participants

A total of sixteen people participated in this study who were grouped into three distinct roles: organizers (n=7), presenters (n=4), and attendees (n=5). I also participated in the event and my observations and experiences assisted in contextualizing the occasion and identifying the diverse backgrounds of those individuals who attended. Specifically, I noted conference participation by teachers, other educators, Elders, researchers, community members, members of faith communities, students, and residential school survivors and their families. In Table 1, I organize the participant groups and include a brief description of each participant alongside the accompanying pseudonym. To mitigate against the risk of compromising the research participants' anonymity, I have limited the amount of information provided.

Table 1: Participants and Descriptions

Organizers	
Tracey	Self-identified as non-Indigenous; a lead organizer from the institution hosting the event.
Connie	Self-identified as non-Indigenous; a lead organizer from the institution hosting the event.
Penny	Self-identified as Indigenous; an organizer from the institution hosting the event.
William	Self-identified as non-Indigenous; an organizer from an institution affiliated with the event.
Samantha	Self-identified as non-Indigenous; a lead organizer from an institution affiliated with the event.

Laurie	Self-identified as non-Indigenous; a lead organizer from an institution affiliated with the event.
Florence	Self-identified as non-Indigenous; a lead organizer from an institution affiliated with the event.
Presenters	
Lucas	Self-identified as Indigenous in his heritage Indigenous language.
Ethan	Self-identified as mixed heritage (Indigenous and non-Indigenous).
Kayla	Self-identified as non-Indigenous.
Martha	Self-identified as “Indian;” a residential school survivor.
Attendees	
Angie	Self-identified as non-Indigenous; high school teacher in a Catholic school board.
Emily	Self-identified as mixed heritage (Indigenous and non-Indigenous); Chaplain in a Catholic school board.
Percy	Self-identified as non-Indigenous; high school teacher in a Catholic school board.
Carolyn	Self-identified as non-Indigenous; retired high school teacher in a public-school board.
Joyce	Self-identified as non-Indigenous; retired Chaplain in a Catholic school board.

Reconciliation is Difficult

Many of the participants in this study discussed the difficulties associated with understanding what reconciliation is and how this understanding can be acted upon. Joyce, a retired teacher and Chaplain who attended the event, was clear: “Reconciliation is not easy. It’s a harder way to go, but it is certainly the way to go.” In this section, I present the difficulties of this work related to personal discomfort and the challenges of bringing together Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples for the purposes of reconciliation. For emphasis, I present an incident that took place at the event and was described by several organizers and an attendee. The incident occurred when a residential school survivor was denied a resource distributed to teachers to support their instruction about residential schools. Finally, I share narratives about the complexity of reconciliation given its systemic, intergenerational, and institutional nature which necessitates “breaking the cycle.”

Personal Discomfort

The personal discomfort resulting from engagement in, and in some ways required for, reconciliation was a prominent topic of discussion among event organizers. Personal discomfort refers to the internal and emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually informed feelings associated with unsettling. Tracey, a central organizer affiliated with one of the education institutions hosting the event, described that her work was “an emotionally heavy job” when she discussed the investment of emotional labour in reconciliation activities:

It was not uncommon for me to have some kind of moment, probably a private moment, where I had an emotional response to it, whatever that might have

looked like. The work had an impact, emotionally. I think being non-Indigenous there were many times where I thought: “You know what, maybe I just need to throw the towel in. Maybe I’m not the right fit here.” Usually then, however, there would be a sign or somebody would say something that would remind me: “No you just need to keep going a little bit longer.”

Tracey’s personal identity as a non-Indigenous person was a challenge for her as she considered her role in supporting efforts explicitly connected to the larger reconciliation agenda in Canada. While she recognized that organizing efforts might be better suited for an Indigenous person, she persisted in her role, which was fostered by positive feedback. Tracey identified that the work took a toll on her “mental well-being,” while recognizing that her upbringing, skin colour, and how people perceive her gives her the “privilege” to participate in social justice initiatives without always being the subject of those activities.

For Connie, the events surrounding her role as an organizer had a personal impact. In the interview she shared how she has taken a break from some of her professional involvement in reconciliation activities, despite her ongoing personal interest as she shared here:

After the conference we met another time or two as a committee but I haven’t been involved particularly in truth and reconciliation work since then. Maybe I need that reflective space ... It hasn’t been clear to me how to re-enter that or where to re-enter that ... That’s not true of my personal life but I don’t know how to bring that back into my professional life. I have lots of personal reflections. I have personal connections and commitments to Indigenous communities here and in central America, which are lifelong. For now, at least, I don’t see an

opportunity in my professional life to reconnect with that work. But I'm not disconnected personally.

Connie's disengagement from reconciliation-based work resulted in her separating personal and professional interest/action. This phenomenon was uncommon in conversations among most other participants as they could not establish a distinction, or they explicitly stated there was no such distinction to be made, between personal and professional identity.

Laurie, another non-Indigenous member of the organizing committee, acknowledged the importance of leaning into the discomfort that comes from the difficulties of reconciliation. Remarking on her work as an organizer, she stated:

I don't tend to like conflict, but I was able to sit in the middle of those meetings and not run away from it and hear the hard messages and the difficult stories and still admire the group that we hung together in spite of all of that. The word reconciliation can sound really sweet but it involves people on all sides being willing to hear each other and not say that there is something wrong with you or me, but there are things here we have to work through.

Laurie disclosed that she experienced growth as a result of being a committee member and acknowledged her own contributions. The narratives from Tracey and Laurie speak to the significance of unsettling for non-Indigenous peoples that comes from reconciliation efforts, which might present as a challenge for those who are uncomfortable with being uncomfortable. However, these narratives also speak to the privilege settlers have in reconciliation-based work. Tracey and Laurie both referenced how they wanted to or could step away from reconciliation because of the discomfort it

caused, but they acknowledged the fortitude it took for them to stay in the work despite their feelings.

Penny, one of the Indigenous members of the organizing committee, spoke several times in our conversation about her holistic vision of reconciliation and how difficult it can be for settlers:

I think it means taking a hard look at Canadian society and what Canada is built on. That is very uncomfortable for a lot of non-Indigenous people. It's something I've seen in my work. It's very hard to talk about it, even for people who are socially aware.

Reconciliation to me means having those difficult conversations and having an open heart, body, mind, and spirit to having those conversations.

Penny's comment speaks to an urgency of moving Canadians toward discomfort and upsetting their distorted vision of Canada. She also extends this to critique how those who are "socially aware," such as members of the organizing committee, need to go further in interrogating their own beliefs and values.

The narratives shared in this section communicate the importance of uncomfortable learning and unlearning among non-Indigenous peoples. These efforts involve emotional and intellectual labour that, for some, is too difficult. Conversely, disengagement can reaffirm settler privilege. For example, Indigenous peoples do not have the ability to step away from oppressive structures that shape their contemporary reality and daily lived experiences. Within a colonial settler state, settlers have the privilege of becoming disengaged and return to the status quo by denying the need for reconciliation in Canada, or by participating in superficial activities that do not move

toward substantive change for Indigenous peoples. Further below, I discuss the role of education in facilitating reconciliation and how participants understand education to achieve reconciliation.

Bringing Together Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples

Another theme that emerged from the organizers' narratives was the tension of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples working together under the auspice of reconciliation. Penny offered her perspective about this in the following:

I guess learning to work in a committee setting like that, especially around something like truth and reconciliation, and there are Indigenous people involved as well as non-Indigenous, we have to learn to work together as one. There's obviously a really problematic history surrounding some of these relationships, such as with religious organizations and Indigenous people, and so working towards reconciliation requires finding ways to bridge those gaps.

Here, Penny alludes to the complexities of bringing together Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples amidst the colonial history that is a pervasive, often latent, aspect of contemporary relationships. In the context of organizing this specific event, Penny's comments point to the importance of working together, but also highlight the risks of developing tunnel vision in the push to coordinate a successful event. There are contemporaneous impacts originating from historic and ongoing injustices that require attention, but the gaps remain and need bridging as committee members are compelled to work together.

Another pertinent example of the challenges related to bringing Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples together for reconciliation was the exit of one of the Indigenous

organizers from the committee. Connie explained that she would not engage in any reconciliation-based activities without Indigenous voice and this member was invited early into the process as an Indigenous partner. When the Indigenous collaborator left the group, Connie became “more aware of what a mammoth undertaking reconciliation is.” For Samantha, it was important that the group move on for the sake of the event and what it stood for:

When you think of the irony, that in truth and reconciliation work, the partner who left was the Indigenous partner. What we decided, however, was that we were not going to stop and that we would seek other Indigenous partners. That worked, actually, quite well.

It gives the grittiness to truth and reconciliation.

While Samantha realized the importance of having Indigenous participation on the committee, she focused on describing the departure as a learning experience, mostly related to conflict:

Sometimes you just can’t push the river. Sometimes with all the best intention – I have no doubt that I, we, was blind in some ways. I get that – but no matter how hard you try, this isn’t the place to keep trying. The person leaving the committee helped us to see that at this moment, with other partners, something could begin to flow again. But again, that experience of conflict was invaluable.

Embracing conflict as a site of learning, Samantha did not indicate what that conflict meant to the Indigenous person who left the committee. Her focus was on educating others, by offering an event about residential schools, and there was no space left in their work to slowly deconstruct the dam established by the conflict: the river had to flow.

Samantha's comment speaks to the way that settlers can unconsciously maintain control of the reconciliation agenda. In my conversation with Samantha and others, I found little consideration of the ways that the committee's efforts could engage in truth and reconciliation on terms set primarily by Indigenous peoples.

Connie also spoke to the tension related to the departure of the Indigenous committee member, and provided a different perspective:

Frankly, I don't know what the right thing was. If this was supposed to be a process of reconciliation, do you just walk away from the partner who says, "I'm not interested in reconciliation?" and try to work with somebody else? Or do you try to stay with the process and see where it goes? I mean I did what I did, which I think was certainly hard for me. I think it definitely impacted the work of the committee.

I mean I understand the bigger context. When I try to understand and think about: how could things have gone so wrong? How could things have gotten so uncooperative? It was maybe an opportunity to demonstrate that reconciliation is not that easy. It won't be a simple process. It's not just because a small group of people commits to it that it's going to happen.

Connie's reflection on this part of the committee's work speaks to some deeper reflection on what reconciliation means. While she proceeded with the committee's organizing efforts without uncovering the reasons why the Indigenous committee member left, she poses important questions that should be answered. In doing so, members of the organizing committee might reach a place where reconciliation does not become

contingent on pushing past historic wrongs, or contemporary conflict, for the sake of bringing reconciliation to an abrupt conclusion.

For these organizers, they firmly saw reconciliation as a challenge following the complications arising from an Indigenous committee member leaving the group. Despite being rooted in a specific context (i.e., organizing the event), the participants' stories bring attention to the challenges of working interculturally and the weight of hundreds of years of colonization on the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, even when those efforts come with good intentions. Furthermore, the narratives point to the importance of interrogating the uncomfortable feelings and emotions that arise from reconciliation-based work, despite the organizers' insistence that in the name of reconciliation, Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples should push past this discomfort. In the next section, I present a specific incident that occurred at the event as a further example of the challenges to reconciliation efforts in Canada.

The Incident

During the interviews with research participants, the difficulties of reconciliation became increasingly obvious. One incident at the event revealed the complexities of what can lie beneath a reconciliation enterprise. In this section, I provide participants' descriptions of the incident and their responses to what occurred.

Teachers registered for the event were eligible to receive a teaching resource about residential schools that could be retrieved from a table staffed by volunteers. From what I learned in the interviews, a residential school survivor asked for the resource but was denied one because he was not identified as a classroom teacher linked to a school or school board. After the event, the incident was reported to a member of the organizing

committee, the organizing committee held a meeting to determine how to address the issue, and an email was sent out to the attendee listserv explaining what happened. Many of the organizers, although not all, spoke about the incident during our interviews and expressed how they were unsettled by what took place.

In conversation with Connie, she discussed how the man had been refused a teaching package, the challenge of bringing together different worldviews, and what the incident demonstrated to her about the difficulty of reconciliation as revealed in the following:

I didn't witness it but I heard of it afterward. I feel like overwhelmingly the conference was a positive learning experience, a coming together; but that incident showed me that even within these good times those dynamics of Otherness, those dynamics of power and privilege, still exist, permeate, show up, interrupt. I've struggled with how much personal responsibility to take for that.

Kaitlyn: Personally yourself? As an organizer?

Connie: Yes. Because there's the dynamic of the white academic mindset: here is the plan, here's how it's going to be carried out, and here's what's going to happen. I knew before that we were coming up against what I see as a more Indigenous, organic process of things will emerge, things will happen, and you go with them and sometimes that's where the deepest learning is. So I knew that those things were bumping up against each other and in the interest of just having this whole thing happen, I think sometimes we very superficially address those tensions and just try to keep things moving forward. Maybe it's a total

overestimation of how much power I had to make decisions, to think that I could have somehow mitigated that kind of thing from happening.

And like a lot of this experience, it demonstrated how difficult reconciliation is. Connie explicitly references how the committee was intent on hosting a good event and leaned toward “superficially address[ing]” tensions that arose. Connie raises important questions about the type of atmosphere that was established among the committee and wonders if the focus on completing tasks surrounding the event fostered an abridged commitment to reconciliation.

In Samantha’s narrative about the incident, she shares information about the approach taken by the organizers and sympathizes with those who were directly involved:

There was someone who was a residential school survivor and wanted a kit. He came, waited in line, and was told “No.” That was a cause of great upset within the person and there were a series of phone calls. We got a phone call from somebody else who was at the conference and was very upset with the committee that this had happened. This was re-triggering the person. So I made a phone call to the person who had called and asked what we could do. We had a meeting, we tried to loop back into that person, there was going to be a public naming to the group on the email list that this incident had happened, and we were very sorry. I remember looping back into the original caller, explaining all this, and two things: he never returned the call. He never looped back in. That was a surprise to me because he had brought it forward and we acted on it. The other thing was when I heard that incident described at a meeting, I felt very badly for the person who was refused, but I also felt badly for those folks who were just trying to get them

to the teachers. And somehow all their work got summarized into this one thing that wasn't right. I remember feeling there's something off here.

Samantha's experience with the incident builds on Connie's perspective in a noteworthy way. Connie's narrative points to how non-Indigenous peoples can unintentionally push past the tensions inherent in reconciliation and miss the unsettling labour needed to raise peoples' consciousness that is required in much of the work of reconciliation. Samantha explains how the group tried to face the tension of the incident head on, but then points to her discomfort with the negativity that shrouded the efforts of the group. These contradictions speak to the challenges associated with reconciliation, individually and collectively, and across Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples' experiences.

Angie, a non-Indigenous high school English teacher who was an attendee at the event, shared what she observed:

So we're sitting on a bench and I saw what was happening. And I said, "Do you think I should stick my nose in that and just give him mine?" Because here he was, a survivor as well, and he wasn't given the guide. I was going to get up with my guide and then it went elsewhere and I couldn't really find my way to get in there. Not that me necessarily giving him my guide would have helped the fact that here they are, residential school survivors, and they weren't allowed a guide about their own experiences.

Those kinds of things are also telling because when you want reconciliation, then just give him the guide! I talked about it all the way home and then I talked to my students about it. We also got an email about it later on and I was sitting right there kind of going: should I give him mine?

It was a good reminder as a settler about whose stories belong to whom. Just because it's packaged in plastic and it says "Teacher" on it doesn't mean that I own that story.

Angie's initial thought process involved giving her package to the residential school survivor who was denied one. However, she became fixed in her struggle to sort out what to do and the moment for action seemed to fade away. In reflection on the incident, she did recognize the larger implications of ownership and thoughtfully questioned who has rights over residential school survivor stories. It was clear to Angie that those who serve in gatekeeping roles have a tremendous amount of power and privilege and can undermine Indigenous ownership, control, access, and possession of information.¹²

The narratives shared in this section uncover examples of several difficulties in participating in, coordinating, and overseeing reconciliation activities. Some of the organizers spoke about the uncomfortable feelings they had while organizing the event, and the challenges and complexities of having Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples work together. Through these examples, I have identified a pervasive element of re/centring settler perspectives of reconciliation. In the next section, I share narratives about the complexity of actualizing reconciliation while working within oppressive systems and structures that inform contemporary life for Indigenous peoples.

¹² Please see <https://fnigc.ca/ocap> for further information about the First Nations Governance Centre's (2020) work on these principles known as OCAP.

The Institutionalization of Colonialism

Beyond discussions of reconciliation in the context of the event, participants related the difficulties of reconciliation to its rootedness in systemic issues requiring institutional change. Tracey briefly noted that reconciliation is “such an easy word to throw around” and that “some laws need to change, or access to certain resources need to change.” She recognized that these matters are difficult to address because “there isn’t understanding around everyday experiences.” Penny, who worked for a social agency in her community at the time of the interview, identified that reconciliation is difficult because action is needed in many social institutions:

Reconciliation in action is having those conversations everywhere: in social services, in education. The impact of how Canadian systems conduct themselves today is pretty devastating for Indigenous people. And there’s the historical piece. But we also need to look at what’s happening today that is preventing Indigenous people from healing. Those systems put up a lot of barriers and this happens everyday for Indigenous people in a lot of really devastating ways that keep that division between Indigenous and non-Indigenous societies very alive. That anger amongst Indigenous people, that comes from 500 years of colonization and from being a part of these systems that do not care about them, that have dispossessed people from the land, and prevent people from having that relationship with the land, and knowing who they are.

Penny later shared about the ways that poverty and homelessness impact Indigenous peoples as an impediment to reconciliation:

There are extremely high poverty rates on reserve here and people don't think about that. People think "it's the reserve, it's their problem. Why are they coming to the city?" That's something I see a lot of in my work, especially amongst funders: "why are Indigenous people coming to the city?" Well, because there is staggering poverty on reserve. There are no job opportunities; education is funded at half of the level that education is for white kids. There's a real lack of understanding.

Penny's narratives point to the interconnected barriers for Indigenous peoples embedded in settler colonialism. Penny makes clear how difficult reconciliation is to identify and activate because it involves numerous social institutions that are still rooted in centuries of oppression and that have non-Indigenous employees who are mostly naïve about these issues.

Based on information in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC) final report, I prepared a brief definition of reconciliation¹³ and shared it with participants toward the end of our interview with the goal of ensuring our conversation reached the topic of the TRC. In response, Connie, like Penny, made links between various social issues and reconciliation:

Child welfare is a big area. But then we've got reserves without drinking water and schools with mold. I mean there's so much to do. And then urban centres with poverty, homelessness, and addiction; there's a lot of action to be taken in terms

¹³ The TRC (2015c) conceptualizes reconciliation "as an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships" (p. 11) in which we must come to terms with the past. Furthermore, "there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour" (p. 3).

of our collective responsibility for making sure that we flow resources where they need to be flowed.

Both Penny and Connie commented specifically on the ways that reconciliation requires addressing the needs of Indigenous communities beyond the specific scope of the residential school system. With such a broad mandate, it becomes difficult to envision what specific actions should be taken to engage with reconciliation, in what order, and by whom.

Lucas, an Indigenous presenter at the event, connected personal well-being and reconciliation to social issues:

What does truth and reconciliation mean to you? The question actually is, what is our truth? Our truth means that we need to heal ourselves, and the reconciliation part can't take place between nations unless you fix yourself, your family, your community, then your nation. We are not at that point yet to say that we are ready to do these sort of things nation-to-nation because there's that small underlying part of: what are you doing to help yourself?

Why are drugs and alcohol such a big thing? Why is child abuse still a big thing? Why is murdered and missing Aboriginal women still a big thing? What are our communities going to do about that? Even though that's a huge topic, it still goes back to: what are we doing to fix ourselves?

It's an endless cycle all the way down. No wonder why younger generations of people are saying that what happened in the past is what they're still facing. It's because of the cycle of abuse.

Emily, an Indigenous educator and Chaplain in the Catholic school system who attended the event, also shared about the cyclical nature of abuse in Indigenous communities:

Why is abuse so rampant? When you look at their history, you start to see it. When you look at the cycle of abuse, of any type of abuse, there's a cycle and sometimes it's learned behaviours and sometimes it's masking pain. If they've learned abuse is how you shut somebody up, they'll abuse their kids: "shut up." And then those kids grow up, kids screaming abuse: "shut up." It's learned behaviour: how do I mask my pain; how do I deal with my pain? I drink. I do drugs. Everyday. Because I can't be here. It hurts too much.

Both Lucas and Emily explicitly referenced the cyclical nature of abuse and trauma, or, what can be referred to as intergenerational trauma. This trauma is a consequence of encounters with settler society and government policies that are rooted in oppression and genocide (e.g., the residential school system).

Connie explained her understanding of colonization and its impact on Indigenous peoples and their experiences in Canada when noting the systemic nature of these issues. She emphasized the role of the *Indian Act* and how resources alone cannot address some of the systemic challenges that exist today:

I don't even know how to describe how I feel every time I hear on the news the conditions on reserves where there's no drinking water, contaminated land, substandard schools. What are we waiting for? How is this acceptable in any way? I mean those are concrete things we can address. All it takes are resources. I think it's more difficult to address issues like youth suicide, addiction, and violence. Those are more intractable problems; you can't just solve them with

money alone. They're not completely removed from the problems of land, and water, and education, but they do go beyond that. At least let's do what we can do now.

We still have the *Indian Act*, and, again, I think, why? It's an entrenched classification for part of our population that doesn't exist for anybody else. I understand Indigenous people have rights and those rights need to be respected, but surely they can be enshrined in different legislation that takes out the discriminatory parts. I know legislative agendas are difficult, but it just seems there's not much work or action taking place on that.

Connie's narrative highlights the complex interrelated barriers to reconciliation efforts in Canada stemming from the institutionalization of colonialism across various social institutions. While she spoke about these as challenges to reconciliation, they are also important components of a reconciliation agenda.

The issue of prejudice and racism was also a theme in several interviews. Martha, a residential school survivor who presented at the event, shared thoughts about prejudice, the different ways that Indigenous peoples are impacted by the residential school system, and the racist beliefs the residential school system sprang from. She stated, "non-Indigenous peoples have never worked with us before because they've always been against us. They wanted our lands so then they used all those systems to get it, instead of working with us." Carolyn, a retired secondary school teacher, repeated several times that land is "the biggest, most immediate concern" for reconciliation. Similarly, Ethan, an Indigenous presenter at the event, stated that "prejudice like that cuts pretty deep" and

acknowledged the 150 years of government policies that have oppressed Indigenous peoples, which he linked to land:

I suggest you go down and talk to some of the people from the Caldwell First Nation, and the kind of prejudice they're encountering in just trying to reassemble their lands; and every time a piece of property comes up that they can add to their land base, it's amazing how the price just suddenly goes through the roof.

Many of these participants linked reconciliation to issues beyond residential schools, including the efforts of colonial governments to appropriate land from Indigenous peoples. However, conversations about reconciliation did not include any unsolicited responses about restitution. These non-responses could suggest that reconciliation is not the most applicable framework for obtaining just outcomes in settling land claims, fair dealing in interpreting and applying treaties, or returning lands to Indigenous peoples.

Summary of the Difficulties of/for Reconciliation

While I hoped that the interview responses would clearly define what reconciliation means to the participants of this study, I instead found that those invested in reconciliation, as organizers, presenters, and attendees of an event dedicated to reconciliation, were keen to outline various characteristics that pointed to the challenges. In speaking about reconciliation outside the context of the event, participants shared about the need for reconciliation but foregrounded the complexity of achieving goals since many interconnected social institutions require transformation, or perhaps, dismantling. All the narratives collected in this research study bring awareness to the complexity of what reconciliation means and how difficult it is to convey.

Although the event was situated in the context of professional learning for educators, the organizers, presenters, and attendees in this study identified the complex nature of reconciliation across different social issues such as homelessness, child welfare, murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls, and well-being among Indigenous peoples. Connie noted that reconciliation does not need to be a silo, but instead can inform all social issues:

rather than truth and reconciliation being a specific process, it can also be the work we do anyways everyday. It's almost like truth and reconciliation has become its own area of work, but it actually resides in all of these places where we've always had interconnections and intersections.

In the next section, I build on the theme “reconciliation is difficult” to share narratives which explore the second theme “action for reconciliation” through education and relationship building.

Reconciliation Through and For Action

Despite several participants describing the difficulties of articulating and actualizing reconciliation in the context of the event and in everyday life, they also emphasized that reconciliation needs to happen through action. In this section, I share participants' narratives about the role education can play in reconciliation, with specific attention to the importance of making learning mandatory, the power of language, and the necessity of including Indigenous voices. Participants also described action through the lens of building relationships with a focus on fostering community connections and caring for people.

The organizers, presenters, and attendees all asserted the significance of acting in the name of reconciliation. Samantha emphasized the importance of mobilizing around the TRC and the momentum it has/had created in Canadian society:

there is this realization that we happen to live at a very significant moment in this process, when so much is coming to light publicly. We get to live this piece of the story. Other people will take up where we left off, but it's not to lose this moment, and add as much momentum as we can to it in our small ways.

Whereas Samantha focused on the action she could take as a non-Indigenous person, my interview with Lucas, an Indigenous speaker at the event, focused on the work he does for his community. He spoke about the action needed to support Indigenous peoples in their healing:

There are too many programs out there about "what the white man has done." But what are we doing to change history? What are we doing to make the future better for our children? As of right now, there isn't anything because the onus is still on the government, on the Catholic churches, on the non-Native people. But we're not making any type of headway towards our truth. Our truth is: yeah, that happened, but what are we doing now?

For Lucas, reconciliation is focused on community healing and well-being. His approach shifts away from focusing on the wrongs of settler society to recentre Indigenous peoples as contemporaries who have the capacity to thrive. Lucas, who described himself as a "helper," shared a lengthy narrative about an interaction he had with an Indigenous teacher through his work with a local school board. This narrative, again, speaks to the significance of Indigenous peoples self-actualizing their own healing journey:

I'll share this story with you where a teacher from the Catholic board sat down and she said, "I need to talk to you. I don't know who I am. I lost my language. I lost my culture." I said, "Where did you lose it? In your classroom? At the slots? On the 401?" She said, "No. No. I just don't have it." I said, "You're just too damn lazy to find it." She was shocked. She said, "Nobody's ever said that to me." I said, "Well I'm the first one. Do you know how many times we've said that and there was somebody sitting right beside us that was willing to do that? The window of opportunity is slowly closing. We have every excuse but not the time to make that work."

That's the action plan. We need to get up and get it going. We can no longer say, "I have this or that against me." ...

We need to restore the pride. How do you do that? By showing them: hunting, fishing, bead working, dancing. Every little thing. Show them. This is who we are. This is what it looks like. That's reconciliation in action.

Lucas points to the role of Indigenous peoples in realizing their own healing, particularly through efforts of cultural resurgence, which he aligned with reconciliation. Lucas did not suggest that Indigenous peoples wait for government(s) to facilitate healing, but that Indigenous peoples take responsibility for activating self-determination in their communities.

Martha – who served as a presenter at the event – is a residential school survivor, an active member of her residential school survivor community, and was involved in the TRC's hearings. In this narrative, Martha discusses her role in educating non-Indigenous

peoples about residential schools. She directs attention to the action that non-Indigenous peoples need to take in the reconciliation project:

In my talks I'm getting more truthful about Canada. I believe that's a social action because people don't want to be told they're racist. They don't want to be told they're bigots. They don't want to be told they're greedy. So I've gotten to that point now because I haven't seen any change in anybody, especially people affiliated with churches. Now I'm in the habit of saying "Am I going to be the sermon?" I'm not a sermon in a church service. The Minister usually has me by the door and as they're walking out the little old ladies will come by and say "That was wonderful. That was wonderful." Well it's not wonderful. And I don't want to be part of something that they're just going to listen to and think they're not a part of it because all of Canada is part of the Calls to Action.

Martha revealed her frustration with the lack of change and action among some Canadians, which compels her to become increasingly blunt about Indigenous realities. For Martha, the TRC Calls to Action provide obvious direction for non-Indigenous peoples to become actors in reconciliation, while also identifying that awareness and congratulatory pleasantries are woefully insufficient activities to make real change. For Lucas, there is a different project that is of crucial importance. Indigenous communities should focus on healing themselves in efforts separate from settler activities of reconciliation. Juxtaposed, these two narratives bring attention to the diverse projects associated with reconciliation which differ between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Moreover, in both projects, these Indigenous participants take on and place

a tremendous amount of emotional labour and onus on Indigenous peoples themselves in having TRC action come to fruition.

When presented with the quote about reconciliation from the TRC, several participants noted how reconciliation involves ongoing action. Samantha put it this way: “I think ongoing process is one of the key phrases. It’s not a one-shot deal. Somebody apologized, now we did it and it’s over.” Florence, another organizer, also responded to the quote identifying the action implied in the definition I put together from the TRC’s report: “Each of these phrases¹⁴ are almost code-phrases for a whole pile of work and a whole pile of initiatives. ‘We must come to terms with the past:’ well you have to unpack that.” One of the ways participants identified action for reconciliation was through education.

Through Education

A primary purpose of the TRC-inspired event was to promote and support teaching and learning of topics related to the residential school system. This purpose led participants to consider the multifaceted nature of teaching and learning reconciliation through formal schooling environments, learning in community contexts, and in reflective un/learning. Related to formal teaching, William shared his concern about the “gap” of knowledge teachers have regarding Indigenous content including residential schools and treaties, and posed the question, “how do we teach the teacher?”

Tracey, also a teacher, described her understanding of the need for a local event that fostered learning about residential schools:

¹⁴ Awareness, acknowledgement, atonement, and action.

I think conversations started like: “there needs to be more conversation around the stuff in the K-12 setting,” because a lot of the people I sat around those tables with in the early days were saying “students just don’t know about this.” Then you get into high school or even later on in your schooling, and you question: “What? Residential schools?” particularly with the non-Indigenous population. And I think it was getting to a point where I was hearing from Indigenous people “This is exhausting,” having to constantly tell your story. There needs to be some responsibility on the other end of things.

While not a formal teacher, Connie, another organizer, also noted the importance of the education system:

Firstly, I mean, for all of us as Canadians, I think it means understanding and acknowledging our history. This was something that I thought was very important throughout that whole process [of organizing the event]. It means teaching about that history in schools, and not just one course: integrating it into curriculum across subjects, across years so that we really understand.

With the organizers specifically interested in educating educators, it is no surprise that the formal education system was understood to be an important entry point into action for reconciliation. In developing the event, the organizers hoped the information would be dispersed through the education system by the educators and administration who attended.

Having worked in education for over thirty years, Martha shared a story about her role as a trustee and her ongoing efforts to teach people about the residential school system:

I was a trustee for four years and in that time is when I started doing this work. A trustee who I had gotten to be very friendly with asked me, “Why do Indians hate our education system?” And I laughed. I said, “You’ve got to be kidding? Right?” I thought, “You’re a trustee!” I said, “Have you heard about residential schools?” And he replied, “What are those?” So I explained to him. And by the next meeting I had made him a binder full of pictures, and a book on treaties that was made here, and a small book written by a residential school student who lived here about his sexual abuse. I didn’t make it too bulky because I thought, “He won’t read it. But if I make it light, he’ll go through the pages.” He did and he showed the director and she asked me, “Could you make one for each of the trustees?” So then I made them for all of the trustees. And then when I did that, they asked me to start presenting: first at the admin level, and then further down. And now we’re doing it all over again.

From that point on I always kept thinking, “I can quit. Surely everybody in the world now knows about residential schools.” Even with the TRC I found that I couldn’t quit. People were always leaving my session saying, “I never knew. I never knew.” And if I don’t hear it, somebody else hears it. Two weeks ago, I did sessions in our school district. There were 800 people at each of the sessions and my daughter was in the back and she heard the comments like “I never heard about that” and “I never knew that.”

So I would always see the need for education and awareness so that’s why I stuck to it. And when I felt like I should go to the impacts, I just couldn’t go there

because people don't want to hear about impacts if they don't know what caused them. So I had to keep doing education and awareness.

While it is clearly tiresome work, Martha's words express the importance of educating non-Indigenous peoples about residential schools, particularly educators. In contrast, Tracey spoke about the responsibility people have for their own learning: "I feel like reconciliation in some ways is just being more aware, taking the time to seek out information, and seeking out the more accurate information." Like Martha, Penny highlighted the lack of awareness that she notices among some people: "I'm often surprised at how little people really know. Either people who are somewhat aware are really empathetic and people care, but the conversations aren't happening, and the information isn't totally forthcoming." Kayla, too, shared about the significance of "awareness" to advance reconciliation:

I really think that the key is for people to understand the context, the history, and what came before, and why things are as unsettled as they are. Only then, when there is a deeper understanding between all the elements, can people really know what's going on and I think then we'll be able to undo some of the damage to move forward together.

While many of the participants expressed the importance of awareness and education about history, residential schools, treaties, and the intergenerational impacts of colonialism, there was notably little elaboration on the action people can take once they have gathered some of that knowledge.

In addition to awareness and understanding, as Connie notes, there is deep, internal reflection that needs to take place: "As individuals I think it means examining

our own attitudes and when we come up against some kind of racism in ourselves, just unpacking that and seeing where that comes from.” Ethan, one of the presenters, also identified the “unlearning” of biases and prejudice which is required:

To reconcile is to come through that unlearning process. But it isn’t my first default position. Whether I like it or not, my default position is always going to be what I originally believed. Then I can go: No. No. Wait a minute, and I move to the second default which is my new perspective. So it’s always a second status. Your children won’t have an initial default of prejudice. Their absolute default position will be equality. That’s reconciliation seen through. So long as we are willing to make distinctions between us and how we treat one another, as long as First Nations people are regarded as being, “wards of the state,” you’ve decreed a second-class status right away. That could change tomorrow. The *Indian Act* could go out tomorrow. Would it change the attitudes? It wouldn’t for me because my default position is going to be “I’m a second-class person.”

In addition to learning accurate information about Indigenous peoples, both Connie and Ethan identified some important characteristics of a deeper self-reflective process. Their highly evolved approach involves reflectively intervening and unlearning problematic assumptions and attitudes, biases, prejudices, racism, and discrimination that they may un/consciously have about Indigenous peoples.

Throughout the conversations with participants, education for young people, teachers, policy makers, and everyday citizens was highlighted as an important way to engage in reconciliation. This emphasis on awareness and learning accompanied concerns and suggestions for the multifaceted nature of un/learning. In the next section, I

present participants' narratives on other associated topics that are important for reconciliation, including mandatory content, language, and Indigenous voice.

Mandatory Learning. In my interview conversations with participants, they emphasized the need for non-Indigenous people to learn about Indigenous-focused content and about reconciliation in various educational settings. Participants expressed the need for learning in community, elementary and secondary school programming, initial teacher training, and professional development for teachers. They also elaborated on the topics that should be included, which was not isolated to residential school history (e.g., treaties, a fuller version of Canadian history, and contemporary challenges for Indigenous communities representing the legacy of residential schools).

In discussing the challenges facing the organizing committee and what she observed as a member of the group, Penny made the needs explicit in the following comment: “especially staff at these events, they need some of that competency training themselves. Just doing the event in-and-of-itself isn’t enough.” Placing further emphasis on her point, Penny described another incident that illustrated the need for learning among the non-Indigenous members of the organizing committee:

If we’re claiming that events like this are being done to increase cultural competency, well maybe the individuals who are doing that need the training too. It includes everybody: the Indigenous people and non-Indigenous. Everybody has their own biases. If we’re being inclusive and we’re working towards saying we’re doing cultural competency, then we have to do that work to look at our own biases and find that vulnerability to grow together past our own biases.

There was another incident afterwards in the committee debrief that I think was an issue of a lack of understanding. We had a residential school survivor sitting with the committee who was receiving an honorarium for her participation, and in my work and my experience, that's common practice. If you ask an Indigenous person with a specific experience to come do something, some sort of cultural activity, they need to be compensated for their time. And some of the other organizers took issue with that. And that was really upsetting to me, that this survivor was asked to join this committee, and then her participation was devalued to receiving an honorarium or not.

Penny's observations make it clear that those who choose to be involved with reconciliation require training and ongoing education. In an example unrelated to reconciliation, Emily, too, identified the importance of mandatory training for some topics:

Yesterday, I went to the hospital for spiritual care and we had to go through the proper handwashing techniques on the slides, and confidentiality in the hospital, and then there was the little quiz at the end. There's so many of those things we go through in the workplace, like anti-harassment training. The more that you have to go through that training, the more you start to see.

I remember the first year the harassment piece came out and we had to do it. It was mandatory. You see the slides and it's like, "Really? Suck it up. If somebody whistles at you, big deal." I've worked in the bush with men, so I learned to kind of go, "Whatever." But then you start to understand, especially people that have been abused: wow that's a big deal. That training every year started to change my

way of thinking and now I understand it's not funny. When a man makes a derogatory comment, I can see why you would want to call him to task on it because it's wrong. If one woman lets him get away with it, then he's going to do it to the next one. Who is he going to victimize next? Is it going to get to younger women and girls? When is the cycle going to stop?

I wouldn't have thought about harassment that way if I didn't have to take that training.

While in a substantially different context, Emily's reflection on mandatory training provides some insight into its value, particularly as it relates to the potential for changing people's perceptions.

Building on Emily's insights, Angie commented on the importance of mandatory professional development for educators. Her perspective stems, in part, from what she described as apprehension to teaching some types of content in the Catholic school system:

I think that boards have to commit to some PD [Professional Development] so that people feel comfortable, because I know that there are people who, especially in a Catholic board, are uncomfortable saying anything bad about a priest. They don't know anything but stereotypes; they're afraid they're going to offend. I know there are a lot of teachers who just skim over it, or come to me like I'm an expert, which is also not the way to go.

I think some things may have to be mandatory, and I think beyond that, the voices of administration have to be there, take part in it, and say, "This is valuable and if you're away this day, you will have three opportunities to do this training." We

have to get everybody in a place where they can't bring their marking. No one is going to start to mark when a woman stands up and says, "This is my experience. They took me when I was four."

As an attendee at the event, Angie, and others, recognized the importance of having in-service educators become trained in teaching Indigenous content.

Going further, Percy, a secondary school teacher who became qualified to teach Indigenous Studies courses out of personal interest, shared his ideas about what should be included in secondary school curriculum:

I think every single kid in the education sector should be taking Indigenous Studies as a mandatory course. And being part of the process with the rollout of the new Indigenous Studies curriculum, we're pushing it saying, "We understand Civics and Careers is important" – and Civics is deeply important – "but Careers should be taken out and put into every single course."

Angie conveyed a similar view regarding the Careers course: "I'm getting radical, but I don't see why we teach Careers. I think there should be a mandatory Indigenous Studies class to replace Careers, and then there should be one more mandatory Indigenous Studies class in high school." Carolyn, a retired teacher who attended the event, shared a similar sentiment regarding the importance of mandating Indigenous content for students:

It shouldn't be a case of an individual teacher being afraid to broach the topic. It should be mandated. That should be part of the curriculum where it's not left to the teacher's discretion. I'm all in favour of teacher autonomy for how you present it, but it definitely should be presented somehow.

For these educators, they recognized the potential for mandatory learning that focuses on increasing understanding and knowledge of issues and implications for Indigenous peoples as a start to reconciliation, and that it should prioritize youth. Two participants also proposed removing the Careers course as a strategy to make room for adding mandatory culturally responsive content alongside other Ontario high school curriculums.

Given the work accomplished by the TRC, and smaller efforts such as the local event which backgrounds this research, it is important that people, communities, and organizations continue to make efforts towards reconciliation. However, like Penny notes, it is important that the people who are participating in and/or hosting learning events are adequately educated themselves. These narratives also speak to the importance of integrating learning opportunities across the education system (i.e., for educators, administrators, and students). In the next section, I present participant narratives that identified language as an important consideration in education.

Language of Reconciliation. Several participants expressed concern about the language used when talking about the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Many spoke about labelling and the influence it has on how we live in the world. For William, the language we use to identify people is important: “How is it that we’ve gone through life talking about them, and giving them names: using different titles like ‘Aboriginal,’ ‘First Nation,’ ‘Indigenous,’ and, unfortunately, the acronym ‘FNMI’ without asking what they want to be called?” Martha shared about the ways that investigating one’s use of language, at least for non-Indigenous peoples, is an important part of the education process, as she states here:

When people ask me, “What can I do personally? What can I do?” I throw it right back to them and tell them they’ve got to search their hearts and be honest with themselves. That’s when I use those hard words: racist. “Are you racist? Are you a bigot? Do you still think I’m a dirty Indian? Do you still think I’m a stupid Indian?”

Those are the words that they used on me when I was a child.

Martha’s pointed questions call settlers to task on examining their language and she brings critical attention to the power of language in colonial systems.

Speaking about language and labelling, Ethan stated that language can be used to segregate and allows those with privilege to disconnect themselves from social issues that they assume do not pertain to their lives. He shared his thoughts in the following excerpt:

The main thing that separates us is not posters on the wall, it’s our own language: it’s the words we choose to speak. Because in speaking them we take positions, and perhaps not even positions we want to take, but we certainly stake ourselves out there in a position that our listener hears.

Lucas similarly spoke about the power of language, specifically, how Indigenous peoples understand themselves. In this narrative, Lucas explains the link between language and identity, the importance of cultural context, and the impacts of colonization on language use:

It goes back to words like being traditional, having teachings, living on the rez, Indian time, Natives. Where did they come from? You cannot put those words into another language because it doesn’t fit. Speaking the language, to some people, was taken away. But it wasn’t. It was submerged underground to survive.

So when it had its resurgence, when we started to introduce ourselves again, we connected back to our identity. When we start to say where we live, there are the words that fit into that. But we continue to use those non-Native words and that is where we keep colonizing ourselves.

Examining Ethan and Lucas' narratives together facilitates an understanding of the dual purpose of language in a colonial context. Ethan describes how language is a tool of colonialism used to divide and conquer, whereas Lucas' narrative focuses on the way that language can revitalize Indigenous identity.

While some participants identified the significance of language and labels, several discussed how reconciliation might be the wrong word altogether. As Emily clearly stated: "truth and reconciliation. Oh my God, if I hear that one more time. What does that even mean anymore?" Kayla stated: "reconciliation is not even the proper word that we should be bandying about as far as I'm concerned." Martha also shared her investigative process of coming to understand the word reconciliation and her hesitation of its use:

What is reconciliation is the most asked question in the world. I was in the company of Justice Sinclair and we talked about that and I said, "I think we picked the wrong word." We never had anything to begin with so how can we reconcile something that never was?

These narratives from Emily, Kayla, and Martha reveal their concerns about using the term reconciliation to illustrate the power of language. A final consideration for the theme, action through education, aims at underscoring the value of bringing Indigenous voices into learning spaces.

Indigenous Voices in Learning Spaces. The organizing committee involved Indigenous and non-Indigenous members from the outset, and the group understood that Indigenous voices and perspectives would be involved in every part of the event. Even after losing an Indigenous partner, the committee members regrouped and recruited new Indigenous partners to ensure that various Indigenous voices and perspectives were always included. For Connie, having Indigenous Elders to help guide the process was crucial:

Even when things were difficult, I feel like the Elders were, for me – their ability to stay in the process and their ability to continue to embrace a process of truth and reconciliation, which for them is a lifelong journey and certainly didn't just step into it in the context of this committee – an important and comforting presence. I still have those relationships and I'm grateful for that.

Similarly, for William, having local Indigenous involvement was important: "Education was the first part. The second part, I really felt that there was a need for the local First Nation communities, or Indigenous communities, to be involved." Although framed differently, both William and Connie described the importance of having guidance from Indigenous peoples.

Several interview participants also remarked on the powerful impacts derived from listening to survivors' stories during their planning and at the sessions at the event dedicated to survivors. Speaking about the organizing process, Florence explained the significance of having a residential school survivor on the committee:

It wasn't like turning the TV on and hearing somebody that I had no knowledge of. Here's a woman I had grown to respect and now she's sharing this part of her

life with me. It put a human face on it, a different perspective than the generic stories.

Penny, too, reported on the effect of listening to residential school survivors: “I’ve heard a number of stories and every one of them, you learn something new. It’s moving when you hear someone share about that. It changes you.” Many of the organizers expressed that they learned something important from the survivors’ testimonies and emphasized the importance of listening to stories in person.

For those attending the conference, hearing survivor testimonies was very significant. Joyce spoke about the power of sharing one’s story and its role in the reconciliation process:

I’ve heard residential school survivors speak before. It’s very, very powerful. In fact, we sat at lunch with the people who spoke about surviving residential school. And there was some pride I found in the people that survived because they weren’t able to speak about it before. I think giving voice to anything is a part of healing. When we carry it deep inside, it’s like “maybe it’s only me” and once there’s the affirmation that “it wasn’t just me. It was everybody else and they all have the same feelings that I do,” that’s very empowering. Part of the reconciliation piece, I think, is giving voice to what happened, and being believed and being affirmed: yes, this did happen.

There was agreement among the participants across the three groups that there is power in listening to survivors. Joyce’s narrative adds a layer in which she alludes to the potential power of sharing one’s story.

Percy shared a narrative about previously attending a residential school that was converted into a learning site. Percy appreciated that survivors were at the event to share their stories and he reflected on the power of listening to survivor stories in the school that they attended:

When we go to the [former residential school], we're always given a survivor tour walk. It's one of the most surreal things that you can experience because it's like you're living vicariously through them and they're actually taking a journey back in time as they walk through the halls and the staircase and they stop, and they have a memory of something that transpired. It's very emotionally draining because when they open that door to the boiler room, for example, and you hear the noise, and they say, "Imagine a little girl screaming in here and she can't be heard" and "That was one of my friends," or "That was me," you just want to get out.

While Percy discussed the importance of listening to survivor stories, his narrative also reveals the potential to engage in spectacle by focusing on the most piercing stories of abuse from residential school survivors. Penny offered an insightful suggestion that resists some of this temptation:

I think that the sessions, especially with the survivors, should have had people sitting in a circle. Often there's someone at the front and everyone sits back but reconciliation is not, I don't think, about spectatorship. I think it's about everybody opening their hearts and their minds and putting everyone on an equal footing in terms of hearing those stories and being impacted by those stories. And sitting in a circle is something that I think would have helped in some way

towards doing that. Because Indigenous people, we sit in a circle, where everybody is equal, and everybody is free to share what's in their minds and hearts.

For Penny, having a culturally responsive approach in person-to-person interactions is important, but that was a missing element in the sessions she attended at the event. The circle approach invites equality among participants and mitigates against Indigenous people and their narratives being on display.

Participants suggested that learning about Indigenous perspectives and the historically accurate aspects of Canada's history should be mandatory learning in formal and informal education spaces. A component of this learning involves consideration of language, in which some participants commented on the appropriateness of the word reconciliation. This serves as a reminder that language must be used in ways that are deliberate and thoughtful. Finally, many participants shared about the importance of including Indigenous voices in any learning context, something the event aimed to do through the inclusion of residential school survivors and other Indigenous presentations. However, as was discussed in this section, many of these approaches have problematic outcomes when not considered critically. In the next section, I speak to the importance of relationships in actions for and as reconciliation.

Through Relationship

Regarding action for and as reconciliation, participants also talked about the value of building and maintaining relationships. As Tracey noted, "I think it's good if it's Indigenous and non-Indigenous, or if it's Indigenous with Indigenous people. I don't think it has to be Indigenous and non-Indigenous for it to be classified as reconciliation."

This point illuminates a divergent, while not incongruent, perspective about reconciliation that often references the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples as its focus. Similarly, Laurie, one of the organizers, suggested that reconciliation occurs in all parts of her life and spans more than her relationship with others:

I think reconciliation is going on in me all the time because in any day, we're looking at relationships, and right relationships, and what's wrong with the relationships. We need to all grow deeper so that we can all relate more smoothly with each other in reconciliation.

In discussing relationships in the context of the event and otherwise, participants described the significance of two related but distinct aspects: (a) building community connections, and, (b) the importance of caring for people. In the narratives below, I share participants' voices concerning the importance of relationality in reconciliation which holds the potential for healing and repair.

Community Connections. One of the driving forces for hosting the TRC-inspired event among some members of the organizing committee was to build community connections. Tracey clearly described the potential of the event to support capacity building and establishing networks among local stakeholders in the following:

There were a lot of groups individually saying that they wanted to be involved, they wanted to know more, they wanted to facilitate their own learning around this topic, but they didn't know where to go for those resources. It was also about building community and building capacity. If this school board is wanting to do some work, and this school board wanted to do some work, well why not join

forces and try to do the work together? Or, if this school wants to bring in a residential school survivor but doesn't know where to go or who to talk to, then this is an opportunity to identify people who I might be able to approach. Another goal of the conference was to bring people together, so they had opportunities to talk. They had an opportunity to witness this together, and take ownership over what the next steps are, whatever they may look like for each individual's community.

Tracey's comment identifies an important link between education, discussed above, and the value of working together: there is much to be gained by collaborating in reconciliation efforts.

Building relationships in the educational community was accompanied by building relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. William shared about the importance of connecting with the Indigenous community:

I think what I've learned is the importance of networking, building bridges, getting to know members of the First Nations communities, or getting to know them better. There is a need for community; we need to work together. Not one person has all the answers.

Florence shared a similar sentiment to that of William in reflection on her role as part of the committee:

I think for me, it means taking the opportunities to encounter Indigenous people. To go out of my way to meet them, and discuss with them, and be with them. Because it's only when we can put a face on one another that that work begins. It's not a theoretical exercise.

These excerpts express a common understanding of the importance of community connections. For organizers, one of the goals of the event was to build community relationships, however, some of the participants also revealed that personally, relationships grew out of their role on the committee and the learning that came from it. In the next section, I include narratives about caring for others as a relationship-building component of reconciliation.

Caring for People. As one of the key organizers, Tracey was responsible for many of the logistics of planning the event. However, she also shared about the personal care she had for people:

I worked really closely with an Indigenous committee member. I developed a professional relationship with her, but over time I developed a personal one. You're no longer just a colleague, you're a friend and I need to look out for you. As an organizer, I felt like I needed to look out for the people who were sitting around the table in terms of: I don't want to waste your time. I want you to get something out of this. I don't want you to leave offended.

You feel like you're moderating, but you're also wanting to protect people. You don't want them to come here excited and then have their visions or their voice squashed when they walk out the door. You also don't want to hear someone say something that's disrespectful. However, these are the things we have to address. This is real life. This is what's happening in our schools. This is what's happening in the community. This is what happens at the grocery store. If we don't address these things here and call people out on it, how are we ever going to advocate for that to happen in these other things?

Tracey's narrative shifts away from those shared at the beginning of the chapter where she spoke about the discomfort she felt in the organizing process. Here, she acknowledges the power she had to maintain safety for those around her, particularly the Indigenous committee member she worked closely with.

Furthermore, Tracey identified the importance of having Indigenous representation on the committee, but framed it in a way that speaks to the care she had for people involved with the organizing process:

I didn't want someone to feel like they were around the table to fill a seat, or to be the Indigenous person around the table, because that could happen. That was a concern throughout: non-Indigenous people out-weighting the Indigenous representation we had. It wasn't without trying. I did the best I could as one person to amp up that involvement. But it was difficult. Then you get to a point where you think others are going to perceive this as just getting the token person around the table, and you don't want that either. That was something I often struggled with as well. People want to see visually that there's diversity there, but sometimes I feel like the diversity comes when you start unpacking the layers that people bring with them, and their involvement, and that just seeing someone is not enough. You have to see, are they a good fit?

Tracey's narratives reveal the importance of active, intentional care for those involved with reconciliation-based work. Other people, too, who attended the event identified the importance of caring for others. Carolyn shared this after describing the emotional impact of listening to a survivor's story at the event: "I only hope that people were there to look after him because that's a lot for him. He was a pretty old fella too. I hope it wasn't just

‘Thank you for your talk,’ and you know, ‘Drive home.’” Carolyn’s concern for the survivor aligns with some of the concerns about the sessions being a spectacle that were shared by Penny. Samantha described a relevant encounter as a moderator during a survivor session:

I was moderating a survivor’s talk. When it was over, I had to go look up something else for the next room, and when I came back, he was gone. I remember feeling very, very badly about that: that I didn’t check in and ask, “How are you?” I felt like there was a big piece I missed, unintentionally, but there was something off about it.

For Tracey, Carolyn, and Samantha, care is a vital component of reconciliation, especially in the context of Indigenous peoples’ contributions to reconciliation-based activities.

Several of the organizers’ interest in bringing Indigenous voices to a learning space about residential schools, and key organizers showing interest in caring for those involved with the event, highlights a necessary touchstone in reconciliation activities: establishing and sustaining relationships. Moreover, when residential school survivors are asked to be a part of reconciliation efforts, it seems pertinent that care be a central consideration. While participants revealed the importance of caring for people as part of the reconciliation process, it was not always actualized.

Moving Forward With Reconciliation

While the interviews did not collectively provide a clear definition of what reconciliation means,¹⁵ even in the context of the TRC-inspired event, participants did emphasize that reconciliation is difficult to articulate and difficult to engage with. Moreover, there seems to be an underlying tension in reconciliation activities, especially surrounding one-off events like the one used as the case of this study. In these instances, it begs the questions: who is reconciliation for, and, on whose terms?

The participants described that reconciliation is important and requires action, specifically through education efforts and relationship building. With the aim of developing respectful and supportive relationships, it might be possible for repair and healing to take place between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Connie shared a narrative about some measure of repair that took place between herself and the Indigenous member of the organizing committee who left the group:

Without revisiting any of the difficult things that had happened, it was a step back into that relationship. I don't know whether it was a one-off or whether it was an opening to continue the relationship, but it was some degree of reconciliation.

Joyce shared more broadly about the repair needed in society: "reconciliation means when there's a harm been done or a break in the fabric of society, how does one knit that

¹⁵ Laurie shared a prepared statement about what reconciliation means to her:

I think it's basically listening and hearing. Reaching out. Remembering and going forward, but not forgetting. It's peace. It's being there for the long haul. It's being willing to change. It's looking at the *Indian Act*. It's changing curriculum. It's righting wrongs. It's writing a more truthful history of Canada. It's sitting down together in peaceful discussion. It's being part of changing laws. It's moving forward together. It's unity and reconciliation. It's being aware that change takes time. If one side is stuck, we can't move forward. And I said, we are all on a steep learning curve.

fabric together?” Percy offered a sentiment of repair and reconciliation in the context of the Two Row Wampum:

For me reconciliation is coming to a realization that something has happened in the past that is deemed to be indefinitely wrong, and then stepping back and saying, “I’ve done something wrong and now I need to ask for forgiveness.” By asking for forgiveness you can come forward and then start anew. In the context of reconciliation, we are coming to a point where the two parties can meet and reconcile their differences and try to go on that journey again, almost like the Two Row Wampum where the premise was you continue on your journey and don’t interfere.

For these participants, there is an understanding of coming together in reconciliation. However, it is unclear if there is space left open for Indigenous peoples to ignore the invitation, or if it is simply expected that they will accept apologies and participate in settler motivated efforts of reconciliation.

Martha shared about what she has seen regarding reconciliation among young people:

One of the students in a class I worked with looked at me and said “You know my grandfather is truly a racist. So is my Dad. But when I came home and told him about the things that Indians had to go through, he was really surprised. I think my Dad will change now.”

And I thought “WEEEEEEE.” You know only one at a time can we ever hope to really change anybody because I haven’t seen it any other way.

I told the little, wee kids, second grade or so, about how I only had one doll in all the time I was at residential school. After the session was over, a girl came with her little ceramic doll and gave it to me and she said, “I want you to have this.” And I said, “I can tell by your handprints that you carry it around.” There was dirt on it; I could tell she played with it. She said, “No I want you to have it.” I thought, “Oh my goodness.”

I think if all of Canada was like that, then I would believe that reconciliation had occurred. But I don’t expect to see it in my lifetime.

While having feelings of restraint about the possibility of full reconciliation, Martha’s narrative speaks to the potential of young people to be changemakers among their own peers and even older generations. The girl in this narrative, while in a trivial manner, exhibits important characteristics necessary for reconciliation: awareness of history, awareness of one’s privilege, a commitment to changing one’s action, and reparations for Indigenous peoples.

Chapter Summary

The voices of the event organizers, presenters, and attendees shared in this chapter speak to the importance of action through education and relationships for reconciliation. They also shared challenges related to understanding and actualizing reconciliation, notably the inherent personal discomfort which is necessary for this work, the difficulties associated with bringing together Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, and the institutionalization of colonialism. While these interviews took place in the context of a TRC-inspired event, conversations covered much more and most of the presenters and attendees I spoke with referenced the event at minimum. Therefore, while this

dissertation is focused on a specific case, these participant narratives offer much more beyond the scope of a specific event. In the next chapter, I bring together my analysis of the interview conversations alongside relevant literature.

Chapter Six: Discussion

Reconciliation in the Canadian context is difficult to define (Graeme & Mandawe, 2017; Martin, 2009), but is often linked to the residential school system (Chrisjohn & Wasacase, 2011; Graeme & Mandawe, 2017; Nagy, 2012). Participants in this research study identified how reconciliation is difficult to conceptualize and activate because of the need for systemic changes throughout society. Participants' narratives also revealed their understanding that reconciliation is not limited to the residential school system like past dominant government discourses suggest (e.g., *Statement of Reconciliation* in 1998 and Harper's apology in 2008).

Based on the findings in this research study as rooted in the critical and decolonizing perspectives informing this work, I argue that reconciliation is difficult to delineate and apply across all contexts. Reconciliation discourses and activities are best understood within context-specific frameworks. Moreover, like Tuck and Yang's (2012) assertion about decolonization, reconciliation is not a metaphor; actions and activities related to ameliorating the Indigenous/settler relationship must be substantive, ongoing, inclusive of Indigenous peoples and their perspectives, and incorporate knowledge and understanding about Indigenous historical and contemporary realities. The narrative excerpts analyzed in the previous chapter describe the risks in co-opting the language of reconciliation and the implications for unintentionally re-centring (white) settler privilege. Additionally, some participants made it clear that non-Indigenous peoples must recognize that there are other projects that are and/or may need to occur alongside reconciliation, such as cultural regeneration, resurgence (e.g., reclaiming Indigeneity, which might be expressed in contemporaneous ways), and restitution (e.g., restoring

stewardship of Indigenous traditional territories to Indigenous peoples). Additionally, settler goals for reconciliation may need to be on the periphery of those Indigenous-centred projects and activities that are asserted by Indigenous peoples themselves. Together, these recommendations move towards reconsidering what reconciliation means, paying attention to its specific contexts, and ultimately raises the question: is reconciliation a suitable concept for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, and, if so, what actions and activities should it include?

This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first discusses the systemic challenges related to reconciliation by contextualizing the issues within 500 years of conflict rooted in colonization, a history which is often misunderstood by non-Indigenous peoples. I then focus on two specific issues: the *Indian Act* and colonialism in contemporary social institutions. In the second section, I discuss the role of individuals in maintaining settler colonialism. As an example, I return to the incident described in the findings chapter. Finally, I discuss the ways in which participants used reconciliation as a synonym for cultural regeneration and resurgence as well as restitution. Based on these three considerations, I conclude with a call to unsettle discourses of reconciliation.

(Not Only) “500 years of colonization:” Ongoing Systemic Challenges to Reconciliation

Non-Indigenous people’s (mis)understanding of the 500 years of colonialism in what is now Canada informs how reconciliation is understood and activated in settler society, as participants expressed in the interviews and from what I identified in the literature. The RCAP (1996a) report outlines a time during early contact when the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples involved a “rough-and-

ready equality [which] involved a strong element of mutual respect” rooted in the advantages of trade and co-operation, in addition to “a guarded appreciation of the other’s distinctive cultures” (p. 39). Borrows (1997) similarly describes early relations between the Crown and Indigenous peoples as being based on peace, friendship, and respect. He draws on the Treaty of Niagara,¹⁶ calling it a representation of the “nation-to-nation relationship between settler and First Nation peoples” (Borrows, 1997, p. 161). Conversely, the TRC (2015c) states, “to some people, ‘reconciliation’ is the re-establishment of a conciliatory state. However, this is a state that many Aboriginal people assert has never existed between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people” (p. 3). From another perspective, and with clear disregard for a fuller account of Canadian history, the Prime Minister at the time, Stephen Harper, announced to the 2009 meeting of the G20 Summit in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, that “we ... have no history of colonialism” in Canada (Ljunggren, 2009, para. 11). He was swiftly criticized by the media and by Indigenous leaders for this statement (Henderson & Wakeham, 2009), which ironically came little more than a year after his apology to residential school survivors in the House of Commons. While the nature of the historic relationship between Indigenous and settler peoples is debated, Regan (2010) reminds us how, contemporaneously, “Canadian society subscribes to the peacemaker myth as we cast ourselves as heroes on a mythical quest to save Indians” (p. 34). Building on this notion, Ladner (2018) presents an insightful repositioning: perhaps it is Canada that needs to “reconcile itself with the great

¹⁶ Borrows (1997) writes that the Royal Proclamation of 1763 and the treaty ratified at Niagara in 1764 must be read together so as to avoid misreading the Royal Proclamation as a “unilateral declaration of the Crown ... which undermines First Nation rights” (p. 171).

historical myths and lies that form the legal and political bedrock of this nation” (p. 248). In this way, reconciliation becomes the responsibility of settler society, that is, to acquire a more comprehensive view of Canada’s history (e.g., identify Indigenous erasures, unpack misrepresentations, and embrace Indigenous accounts of history), to understand how that informs our present, and to take action to redress this legacy with Indigenous peoples.

During my interview with Penny, one of the Indigenous organizers, she alluded to the historic relationship between Indigenous peoples and settler society. Penny noted that anger in present-day Indigenous communities originates from “500 years of colonization and from being a part of these systems that do not care about them.” Penny explained further that the high rates of poverty, homelessness, and Indigenous incarceration are all connected to colonialism. Participants also acknowledged that settlers, without a proper education on these matters, will not be able to – paraphrasing Kayla – connect the dots.¹⁷ Recognizing that the relationship between the nation-state and Indigenous peoples is based on assimilation (Battiste, 2013; TRC, 2015d) and genocide (Jacobs, 2017; National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019; Palmater, 2017) is vital for changing dominant national narratives, and is a crucial initial phase in fostering healthy relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

As Regan (2010) establishes, the 500 years of interaction between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada is expressed in conflicting stories: “for Indigenous

¹⁷ Kayla stated that “I don’t think the dots are being connected sometimes.”

people, the past is a painful chronicle of broken treaties, stolen lands, Indian residential schools, and the Indian Act,” while non-Indigenous people get to celebrate “settling new lands, nation building, and helping unfortunate ‘Indians’ to adjust to a new way of life (p. 20). This sentiment was echoed by many of the interview participants. For example, Kayla, one of the presenters at the event, called for contesting the “very single-minded narrative that this nation was created by two founding nations – by the French and the English – and we were knit together when the railway went surging through.” Another example of these conflicting stories shared by the participants was related to events taking place at the time I conducted interviews for this research study.

Year 2017 marked 150 years of Canada’s Confederation. Branded as “Canada 150,” the federal government invested a total of \$610 million into community projects, major events, and free admission to all sites operated by Parks Canada (Canada, 2018). In my interview with William, he commented on the nature of the Canada 150 celebrations, noting that “there were government ads that talked about the culture of Canada but only in the framework of 150 years.” William recognized Indigenous erasure in the Canadian government’s presentation of its own national story, and his comment confirms that nationalist discourses perpetuated both inside and outside of formal schooling act as a “cultural tool” (Carretero & Kriger, 2011, p. 190). Further, Mi’kmaq scholar, Pam Palmater (2017), adds an insightful observation:

the powerful state-propagated myth that colonization was benign, well intentioned, inevitable and in the past has not only erased from history the culpability of states for genocidal policies aimed at eliminating ‘Indians,’ but also renders invisible our collective suffering in the present. (p. 74)

Palmater, like William, connects the past with the present. Canada 150, which received state funding to celebrate with fireworks, parades, and a new national logo, is a telling juxtaposition when set alongside the ongoing oppression of Indigenous peoples.¹⁸ By focusing on 150 years of Confederation, the state's narrative excludes important aspects of its longer 500 year relationship with Indigenous peoples, components which have sustained influence on their lives today. This misunderstanding among non-Indigenous peoples serves to reinforce perspectives rooted in settler colonialism, which ultimately limits the potential for Indigenous perspectives to inform discourses and activities associated with reconciliation.

To resist the perpetuation of settler dominated discourses, many of the participants shared that education must expand beyond stereotypical representations of Canada's history and include Indigenous voices to challenge how the education system privileges Eurocentric perspectives. While not all formal educators, many of the participants in this study asserted that education on the topic of colonialism in Canada needs to take place across the K-12 education system and in professional learning opportunities for teachers. Penny also called for cultural competency training among service providers who support Indigenous clients. Further, I propose that cultural responsiveness, anti-racist, and decolonizing training for non-Indigenous peoples could provide more in-depth and much needed knowledge and understanding of issues impacting Indigenous peoples to support reconciliation-based efforts.

¹⁸ While there was Indigenous participation in Canada 150 celebrations, the #Resistance150 movement, initiated by Anishinaabe teacher and storyteller Isaac Murdoch, Michif artist Christi Belcourt, Cree activist Tanya Kappo, and Métis author Maria Campbell, and the "Unsettling Canada 150" movement organized by Russel Diabo, served to provide a counter story to the Canada 150 celebrations (Dunham, 2017).

For First Nations peoples, oppression moves beyond dominant discourses and exists in the “material structures” (Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 28) of settler society. In several of the conversations I had with participants, the topic of the *Indian Act* surfaced as a reason for unreconciled relations between Indigenous peoples and the government. Penny noted that “there are a lot of problematic aspects of the system that are governed by the *Indian Act*.” These participant perspectives are supported by comments made by Mohawk writer and activist, Russel Diabo (2017a), who asserts, “the Indian Act remains the foundation of Canadian colonization of Indigenous peoples. Although it has been amended numerous times ... in the twenty-first century the Indian Act still maintains the main tenets of protection, control and civilization (meaning assimilation)” (p. 23). In the next section, I discuss the *Indian Act* as having a specific role in the colonizing efforts of the Canadian state.

“First Nations people are regarded as being wards of the state...[with] second-class status:” The Role of the “Indian Act”

The *Indian Act* is one specific part of the 500 years of conflict between Indigenous and settler peoples, which participants identified as problematic for reconciliation and is further supported in the literature. First established in 1876, the *Indian Act* consolidated previous legislation to grant the newly formed federal government its own authority over First Nations peoples. The *Indian Act* is both a historical and contemporary document. It was conceived during an era of explicit efforts to assimilate Indigenous peoples through enfranchisement, residential schools, and the extinguishment of Indigenous rights, and remains, today, the legal framework for identity

recognition,¹⁹ some specific rights, and the source of government authority over First Nations peoples. Some of the participants identified a connection between reconciliation and the necessity of addressing the discriminatory aspects of the *Indian Act*, including recognition of the paradox of this legislation. However, there was no uniform consensus about how this can be done. The participants' discussions of the *Indian Act*, and what is written in the literature, reveal complications regarding how reconciliation is understood and actualized, which will require more than education. Systemic change is essential.

In my interview with a presenter at the event who self-identified as having mixed heritage, Ethan commented on both the policy implications of the *Indian Act* and the ways it shapes personal understanding of one's Indigenous identity.²⁰ He stated:

As long as we are willing to make distinctions between us and how we treat one another, as long as First Nations people are regarded as being “wards of the state,” you’ve decreed a second-class status right away. That could change tomorrow.

The *Indian Act* could go out tomorrow. Would it change the attitudes? It wouldn't for me because my default position is going to be “I’m a second-class person.”

Ethan's narrative adds another layer of complexity to the issues surrounding the *Indian Act*; that is, to repeal the legislation will not eradicate the “liminal space” occupied by Indigenous peoples who are constructed as both “legal/political and racialized beings” (Brayboy, 2005, p. 432). Ethan's comment aligns with Lawrence's (2004) discussion of

¹⁹ I acknowledge that Indigenous communities have their own processes for identifying community members. The *Indian Act* is used by the government to identify and categorize status First Nations.

²⁰ Ethan identified as “métis.” I use the lower case “m” to distinguish between the way Ethan used the word (i.e., to refer to his mixed heritage of Indigenous and non-Indigenous), and the Métis: a distinct and sovereign Indigenous group as defined under the *Constitution Act* of Canada.

colonial legislation as a discourse (e.g., the *Indian Act*) that includes “a way of seeing life that is produced and reproduced by various rules, systems, and procedures, creating an entire conceptual territory on which knowledge is formed and produced” (p. 25). The *Indian Act* is embedded in socially constructed “racial regimes” (Wolfe, 2006, p. 387)²¹ that are deeply ingrained in the consciousness of First Nations and non-First Nations peoples.

In addition, the *Indian Act* has a direct paternalistic impact on the daily lives of First Nations peoples (e.g., registering and defining who is entitled to be First Nations under the Act, outlining the limitations and restrictions of reserve lands that are held for the use and benefit of First Nations, the federal Minister can make their own standards and regulations for schooling offered in the First Nation, etcetera). Connie recognized the oppressive function of the *Indian Act* as she relates in the following: “we still have the *Indian Act*, and, again, I think, why? It’s an entrenched classification for part of our population that doesn’t exist for anybody else.” Further, Connie also identified the *Indian Act*’s paradoxical role and its value in upholding specific First Nations rights. Connie’s perspective is in alignment with Woolford (2004), who states that “Aboriginal peoples ... have subverted the tools of colonialism, such as the *Indian Act*, to serve their own purposes” (p. 441). Complicating the issue further are the debates about the future of the

²¹ Ethan’s comment extends Wolfe’s (2006) argument about the “restrictive racial classification” of Indigenous peoples as a component of the logic of elimination (p. 388). For Ethan, he believes he will always be socially racialized even if the settler government repeals the legal framework defining his identity.

Indian Act, especially if the repeal/replace process looks like the 1969 *White Paper*²² (Coates, 2008). Carolyn realized that it is not as simple as repealing the legislation:

First Nations themselves are split in terms of how much of the *Indian Act* should be disposed of. You can't completely eliminate it because they literally would not even have reserves anymore; they'd have nothing. So it has to be well structured, and not by white people.

The *Indian Act* plays a complicated role in structuring the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples as both a tool of oppression and means to resist colonialism in its current form. Carolyn importantly stated that it is First Nations who must primarily determine the future of the *Indian Act*. However, our conversation did not explore issues of sovereignty or self-determination outside of settler colonialism. From Carolyn's perspective, it appears that First Nations will always be under the jurisdiction of a settler state.

Acknowledging that the *Indian Act* includes "genocidal policies" (Jacobs, 2017, p. 50), particularly in the context of gendered discrimination against Indigenous women and girls, further complicates how reconciliation should be conceptualized in Canada. In 2014, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) stated that there were 1,181 missing or murdered Indigenous women or girls in Canada (RCMP, 2014). The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls was launched in 2016 to address Call to Action 41 from the TRC. With the inquiry's mandate to report on "all

²² The *Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy, 1969* was position paper proposed by the Pierre Trudeau Liberal government which recommended that Aboriginal rights be abolished so that First Nations people could become "equal" members in society. This was condemned by the National Indian Brotherhood, which later became the Assembly of First Nations, in their response known as the *Red Paper*.

forms of violence,” their work was broadened to include “sexual violence, family violence, institutional racism in health care, child welfare, policing and the justice system, and other forms of violence, such as negligence, accidents or suicide” (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019, p. 9). Martha, a residential school survivor, also made a connection between residential schools and the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women:

I just read something this morning about murdered and missing Indigenous women. The lady they were writing about, she said she went to Vancouver,²³ which is where I really saw the impact of residential schools, and she said that every person she talks to on the street, their root problem comes from residential school. Even if the person never went themselves, the parents went, and they’re abusing their children in the same way they were abused.

While all Indigenous people are impacted by colonialism, Indigenous women’s intersectional positionalities result in further targeting based on their race and gender (Kubik, Bourassa, & Hampton, 2009; Watson, 2018) to which the Inquiry’s final report identifies the *Indian Act* as a “tool of exclusion” (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019, p. 249) for the rights of Indigenous women and girls.

With an intersectional framework against the backdrop of the *Indian Act*, it is questionable that there can be reconciliation without addressing the colonial oppression of Indigenous peoples, particularly for women and girls. Furthermore, the paradox of the

²³ Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside is known as “ground zero for violence against Indigenous women and girls” in Canada (Downtown Eastside Women’s Centre, 2020, para. 4).

Indian Act leads to concerns about the ways that the legislated relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Crown can be reconciled within social and legal systems as they currently exist. Unfortunately, exploring possibilities beyond the *Indian Act* is not within the purview of this dissertation.²⁴ In the next section, I discuss how colonialism informs contemporary social institutions, and therefore, how Indigenous peoples continue to be impacted today.

Social Institutions are “designed by middle class white people to respond to their needs.” Reproducing Colonialism in Contemporary Contexts

The challenges associated with social institutions being informed by and reinforcing the system of settler colonialism was another issue the participants identified as it related to their understandings of and action toward reconciliation. As many of them expressed, reconciliation is much more complex than understanding the history of residential schools, while at the same time, most focused their descriptions of reconciliation on awareness building. Several of the participants identified that poverty, homelessness, incarceration, and children in care disproportionately impact Indigenous peoples. Penny supplied an insightful comment suggesting that Canada’s social institutions are not made for Indigenous peoples: “they’re designed by middle class white people to respond to their needs and their way of conceiving of how things should be.” Consistent with Penny’s remark, the TRC’s (2015c) final report recognizes that “government, church, legal, and public education institutions in this country have been

²⁴ For more, please see Russel Diabo’s (2017b) explanation and discussion at <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/september-2017/when-moving-past-the-indian-act-means-something-worse/>.

shaped by colonial systems, attitudes, and behaviours, so too have the media, sports organizations, and the business sector” (p. 193). While there are calls for all these entities to play a role in supporting reconciliation efforts, no part of our society is free from colonial influence, and thus, all are responsible for attending to the impacts of colonialism.

Other participants shared insights about the ways in which colonialism exists in the present. My interview with Carolyn, like many others, referenced stories receiving widespread media coverage that coincided with our conversation. In the summer and fall of 2017, there were a series of deaths by suicide in Northern Ontario that received national attention, although for a short period. Referring to a newspaper article, Carolyn briefly summarized the author’s argument:

there aren’t mental health crises on reserves, especially up north where all these kids are suicidal, it’s the ongoing heartbreak of racism. Suicide and despair is the only sane reaction to what First Nations have to face every day of their lives.

This comment aligns with Connie, who identified challenges to Indigenous well-being, including child welfare, lack of potable water, mold in schools, poverty, homelessness, and addiction, along with the difficulties associated with remediating these challenges. In stating that “there’s a short circuit in the fabric of Canadian society that we need to get at,” Angie’s comment speaks to the deeply rooted challenges for reconciliation in Canada. On a larger scale, the strength of settler colonialism comes from the specific institutions (e.g., education, health, justice, etcetera) that are rooted in colonial perspectives and collectively reinforce each other to maintain a complex settler colonial system.

The ongoing reinforcement of colonialism in social institutions which claim to serve Indigenous peoples is exacerbated by the ongoing intergenerational trauma from the residential school system. Emily, a Chaplain who attended the event from a local school board, shared many of her experiences outside the context of the event. In this narrative excerpt, she describes meeting with a residential school survivor in her work:

I had just visited an Elder who is dying. He went through a lot and he won't talk about it. He's at the end of his life and all that pain is still there. He turned to alcohol and chain-smoking. I know there's been so much pain.

All the participants expressed having knowledge about the residential school system, with some having direct personal experience, or in their family. This is significant because not all Canadians know about residential school history, and even more so, about treaties and other agreements between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples (Regan, 2010). The TRC's final report and volume on the legacy of residential schools includes a section on children in care. Writing about the Sixties Scoop and the ongoing overrepresentation of Indigenous children in care, the TRC (2015b) states that "many of the conditions that result in disproportionate Aboriginal involvement in the child welfare system are related to the intractable legacies of residential schools including poverty, addictions, and domestic and sexual violence" (p. 53). As the participants shared, and based on the TRC's findings, it is imperative that settler society acknowledge and act to do away with the manifestations of colonialism in social institutions. Without this, reconciliation in these contexts can never be realized.

One approach the TRC (2015c) recommends for addressing the social issues plaguing Indigenous communities, and as a framework for reconciliation, is the

implementation of The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP; United Nations General Assembly, 2007). The Assembly of First Nations has also called on the government to develop legislation aligning its laws with UNDRIP to ensure minimum human rights standards for Indigenous peoples. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stated numerous times that he was committed to implementing the TRC's Calls to Action, including implementing UNDRIP (Liberal Party of Canada, 2015; Trudeau, 2015). However, Bill C-262 was introduced in the House of Commons by New Democratic Party member, Romeo Saganash, in a private members bill in 2019. It failed to pass the Senate following opposition from Conservative Senators (Brake, 2019) because of the risk of "spiraling into an endless cycle of demands" (Woolford, 2004, p. 430), which they believed UNDRIP would mandate (Tasker, 2019). These reactions to UNDRIP are clear statements about who still controls social institutions, and like Penny mentioned, who these institutions are designed to serve.

With the government's focus on closing "the sad chapter" (Harper, 2008, para. 5) of the residential school era, an approach which is devoid of consideration to the broader implications of colonial activities, state-supported reconciliation efforts have an expiry date. The TRC made bold efforts to ensure its work is maintained, to avoid an outcome like RCAP, through their Calls to Action. These calls necessarily span social institutions including education, child welfare, the justice system, health, and the media to acknowledge the ways in which colonialism permeates society at all levels. Therefore, it becomes necessary to establish what reconciliation means in these specific contexts, and what actions align with each of these sectors.

Summary of Systemic Challenges to Reconciliation

Despite the apology from Harper in 2008, and subsequent opportunity for truth telling as part of the TRC's mandate, there are obvious limits to the potential, or even possibility, of reconciliation in Canada. These limits are present in the ways that the federal government avoids recognizing colonialism as a fundamental element of contemporary society, the role of the *Indian Act*, and social institutions that are simultaneously embedded in and reproducing settler colonialism. The participants' narratives I discussed in this section, and references made to the relevant literature, speak to various social structures that continue to marginalize Indigenous peoples, both explicitly (e.g., racism in the justice system) and implicitly (e.g., lack of access to clean water and its impacts on the physical health and well-being of Indigenous peoples).

In summary, I believe, and like some of the participants explicitly shared, it is not enough to consider the history of colonialism in Canada without acknowledging the ways that colonialism continues to exist today; its conditions and circumstances remain complex. As one example, the *Indian Act* is identified as having some value but is also reviled. As several of the participants described, it provides some limited protections and minor material benefits, which are problematically limited to existence within the settler state. On the other hand, it facilitates ongoing oppression and paternalism as Canada uses it as a tool to control First Nations peoples (Diabo, 2017a, 2017b). Social institutions addressing issues of health, education, housing, and justice present challenges to reconciliation when these institutions are not informed by the principles embedded in UNDRIP. Finally, missing from this discussion is a deeper examination of the role individuals have in maintaining the institutions that uphold settler colonialism. In the next

section, I discuss how individuals, knowingly or unknowingly, maintain the status quo of Indigenous oppression in Canada and, consequently, reinforce settler colonialism.

The Role of Individuals in Maintaining Settler Colonialism

The TRC's final report invites more than the federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments; religious organizations; social institutions; and the private sector to take part in action for reconciliation. The TRC (2015c) states that "all Canadians have a critical role to play in advancing reconciliation in ways that honour and revitalize the nation-to-nation Treaty relationship" (p. 19). Furthermore, "reconciliation calls for personal action" (TRC, 2015c, p. 221). In this section, I interrogate the role of individuals in perpetuating settler colonialism. I discuss the incident that was reported in the findings chapter to explain how individual actions function to support the systemic oppression of Indigenous peoples, and how education about Indigenous peoples' experiences alone does not automatically lead to intervening in settler privilege.

The Incident Revisited: "whose stories belong to whom?"

Knowledge about the residential school system continues to grow in Canada. A public opinion survey reported by Environics Institute for Survey Research (2016) found that, since 2009, more Canadians have heard something about the residential school system, with almost half of the sample of 2,001 people reporting school or education as a source for their learning. After listening to event organizers describe their interests in developing a professional learning event to raise awareness in their local community about the residential school system, I understand that this event was designed with that focus and with the hope of extending people's awareness further, as Tracey highlights in the following:

The organizing committee knew that there needed to be some type of educational component because at that time Canadians knew about residential schools, people knew that they were bad, people knew that students were treated poorly, families were affected, intergenerational trauma, that language was starting to be used, but I don't know if people understood what all that meant, and the systemic results as a result of that.

Despite the intent behind the event, there was a disconnect between perceptions and action, as described in the incident which took place at the event.

In the findings chapter, I presented narratives from organizers and an attendee who described an incident which occurred between a residential school survivor and volunteers at the event. Briefly, I share how I understand what took place based on those narratives:

The organizing committee decided that teachers who registered for the event would receive a free teaching resource kit about residential schools provided by an organization making a presentation at the event. When a residential school survivor who was there as an attendee asked the event volunteers for a copy of the resource, he was denied one. Another Indigenous attendee observed this and reached out to the organizing committee to explain what he saw and his disappointment with what happened. The committee held a meeting and they decided to send an email to everyone who was registered for the event to explain what took place and how they were working to address the incident. There was no further contact with the person who was denied the resource or the person who reported the incident.

The participants' narratives about the incident reveal how individuals can (unconsciously) maintain the conditions of settler colonialism, and in doing so, place restrictions on how reconciliation might be considered from Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives. As Connie stated, "even within these good times, those dynamics of Otherness, those dynamics of power and privilege, still exist, permeate, show up, interrupt." Angie, a high school teacher who attended for professional development and who witnessed the incident, described the gatekeeping of the kit that contained survivor stories as a "good reminder as a settler whose stories belong to whom." However, Samantha expressed that she felt a notable tension:

I felt very badly for the person who was refused, but I also felt badly for those folks who were just trying to get them to the teachers. And somehow all their work got summarized into this one thing that wasn't right.

The first part of Samantha's comment is understandably empathetic. She places emphasis on her discomfort with what occurred for the residential school survivor and acknowledges concern for the individual(s) whose unintentional actions caused harm to the survivor. Then, in the second part, Samantha focuses on her perception that the volunteerism was negated due to some people's preoccupation with the one incident. Instead of recognizing that the volunteer(s)' actions were embedded in settler colonial logics, Samantha preferred to understand the incident as a "passive act" of "unknowing" (Earick, 2018, p. 805). As settlers, I/we must work harder to eschew any unconscious desire to "deflect attention from the settler problem" (Regan, 2010, p. 34), that is, avoidance to "seeing how settler history, myth, and identity have shaped and continue to shape our attitudes in highly problematic ways" (p. 11). As a prospective counter-

narrative, perhaps it is okay that the volunteer labour be conceived in a negative light so that we might take time to view the occurrence as a further unsettling teachable/learning moment and re-examine what still needs to be done in our labours of reconciling. This consideration begs the following question: what will we do now to mitigate against individual perspectives and actions that reproduce the conditions of settler colonialism?

This incident, and the responses to it, illuminate how *institutional* and *individual* actions are implicated in the contemporary relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, and both influence how reconciliation might be understood and actualized. These “settler ‘structures of feeling’” (Rifkin, 2011 as cited in Mackey, 2016, p. 19) “reflect and/or reproduce foundational conceptual frameworks that are essential to settler colonial and national projects” (p. 76). Mackey’s (2016) work examining conflicts over land rights in Ontario and the State of New York purposefully includes settler perspectives as “entry points to understand important characteristics of how emotions and social structures are connected, and how individuals become enmeshed in broader collective ideologies and practices” (pp. 18-19). Individuals and institutions are like strands that are informed by settler colonial perspectives. The strands are weaved together into a settler colonial fabric that is strengthened by the shared values that work together to uphold settler dominance.

Narratives about the incident from some of the organizers and the attendee speak to the role of education in disrupting (or not) people’s understanding of colonialism. In one way, education can fill knowledge gaps; however, as uncovered in the aftermath of this incident, sometimes those who are regarded as already having awareness (i.e., the staff of an event focused on building connections between Indigenous and non-

Indigenous peoples) can unintentionally and unconsciously maintain behaviours and action that can cause or reproduce trauma. This incident reveals the limitations of reconciliation-based activities which focus on uncritical approaches to education and awareness building. I expand on this consideration in the recommendations I outline in the next chapter.

Summary of the Role of Individuals

In summary, my examination of this incident illuminates the need to deeply consider the implications of settler and Indigenous encounters, and the limitations of education based on surface-level awareness. Reconciliation activities must extend beyond the issue of residential schools and cannot be used to absolve settlers of their responsibilities as treaty people who are in relation to Indigenous peoples. At the same time, reconciliation cannot become a universal concept that ignores context-specific circumstances and considerations. Institutional structures and systems operate through individual actors, and in the case of Canada, colonialism has a sustained presence in organizational structures within contemporary society through these actions. The consideration of individual (in)action, along with my discussion of the 500 years of institutionalized colonialism in the section above, speak to the complex nature of understanding and activating reconciliation in Canada. In the next section, I discuss parallel social movements and outcomes that participants presented as distinct but related to reconciliation, and I articulate why it is important to differentiate between the concepts.

Connect “back to our identity” and “give back...all the land:” Expanding Approaches to Reconciliation

As I have discussed previously, there is no single understanding or approach to reconciliation. According to Borrows and Tully (2018), reconciliation between settlers and Indigenous peoples can refer to an “end state of some kind: a contract, agreement, legal recognition, return of stolen land, reparations, compensation, closing the gap, or self-determination” while others suggest it is “akin to an ongoing activity” (p. 4). In other instances, people believe that “reconciliation must be resisted, while others see it as an essential process for ongoing relationality” (Borrows & Tully, 2018, p. 4). Writing about the word decolonization, Tuck and Yang (2012) acknowledge a trend in the “ease with which the language of decolonization has been superficially adopted into education and other social sciences, supplanting prior ways of talking about social justice, critical methodologies, or approaches which decenter settler perspectives” (p. 2). I similarly noticed that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants used the word reconciliation as a synonym for acts of resurgence or matters of restitution. In this section, I discuss the participants’ word choices to further exemplify how reconciliation is a complicated and “contested” concept (Borrows & Tully, 2018, p. 3). This aligns with findings in the previous chapter regarding the importance of language related to reconciliation (e.g., is it even the right word?). I remain curious as to why participants preferred the word reconciliation over resurgence and restitution, among other possibilities, while being sensitive to the influence of the TRC on discourses around Indigenous/non-Indigenous relations.

Cultural Regeneration and Resurgence

Cultural resurgence often refers to efforts which “restore and regenerate Indigenous nationhood” (Snelgrove, Dhamoon, & Corntassel, 2014, p. 2) and exercise of “self-determination outside of state structures (Borrows & Tully, 2018, p. 4). Borrows and Tully (2018) suggest that reconciliation and resurgence are not binary concepts. Regan (2018) extends this in her discussion of the TRC’s work:

Implementing the commission’s calls to action would decolonize and transform settler colonial systems, institutions, and relationships across all levels and sectors of Canadian society. Such actions are necessary to remedy the significant political and socio-economic inequities that oppress and impoverish Indigenous peoples in their own homelands. Reconciliation is therefore contingent on the land-based resurgence of Indigenous cultures, languages, knowledge systems, oral histories, laws, and governance structures. Indigenous resurgence does not hinge on reconciliation with the settler colonial state but is culturally-grounded and community-driven. (pp. 112-113)

The TRC (2015d), Borrows and Tully (2018), and Regan (2018) all point to the ways that reconciliation requires reconciling with the natural world. Thus, reconciliation also moves into considering the relationships between human and other-than-human beings.

The concept of cultural resurgence was particularly prominent in my interview with Lucas, a member of a local First Nation community whose work relates to Indigenous healing and identity. In response to my question about reconciliation in action, Lucas recalled a conversation he had with a colleague regarding “lost” language and culture. He spoke about the “need to restore the pride” through “hunting, fishing,

bead working, [and] dancing.” Interestingly, Lucas used the word “resurgence” just prior to this narrative when referencing the history of colonization on Indigenous peoples’ identities, when he stated that language “was submerged underground to survive. So when it had its resurgence, when we started to introduce ourselves again, we connected back to our identity.” While Lucas included the idea of resurgence in our conversation, he also used the word reconciliation to refer to Indigenous peoples’ engagement with traditional activities and practices. In retrospect, I wish I had asked Lucas to describe what he meant by resurgence, reconciliation, and if there is an explicit relationship between them.

Cultural resurgence movements, for Indigenous peoples and communities, do not rely on settlers reconciling with Indigenous peoples. Regeneration and resurgence can exist independently of reconciliation so that Indigenous peoples focus on healing and repair in their own communities. With this approach, Indigenous peoples are at the centre and it avoids supporting settler preoccupation with reaffirming one’s own privilege that can exist in reconciliation activities.

Restitution

Rowe and Tuck (2017) identify settler colonialism as a “persistent societal structure” which “has meant genocide of Indigenous peoples, [and] the reconfiguring of Indigenous land into settler property” (p. 4). In this context, restitution refers to various forms of compensation including repatriation of land and financial resources (Alfred, 2009). Discussing the possibilities of and challenges to reconciliation, Ethan spoke at length about land. Referencing specific examples in Southern Ontario, including the Cameron Lands in Sarnia and the Caldwell First Nation, Ethan stated that there has been

“chicanery among various agencies, railroads, through one thing or the other, they found ways to exploit and steal the land.” Some scholars suggest that other concepts including reparations, redress, and restitution are better suited to describe the work that needs to be done in Canada (Alfred 2009; Wakeham, 2012). Although Ethan recognized the issue of land as an impediment to the reconciliation agenda in Canada, he did not discuss this issue as a concern of reparations.

For settler educator Carolyn, when asked about reconciliation and what it means to her, she immediately referenced land: “to me it means First Nations land claims – not just settled but give back pretty much all the land.” However, she then moved to “counselling and money – survivors – I mean the stories are horrendous,” and back to land claims, “but we’ll never get anywhere as long as land claims are outstanding.” While recognizing the importance of repatriating land to Indigenous peoples, she never referenced her personal capacity to contribute to this, or what repatriation means for her as a settler. Furthermore, Carolyn, nor any of the other participants, used the phrase reparation. Instead, there was a distinct focus on learning or awareness building, and not how they could contribute to supporting material change for Indigenous peoples.

For Tuck and Yang (2012),

decolonization in the settler colonial context must involve the repatriation of land simultaneous to the recognition of how land and relations to land have always already been differently understood and enacted; that is, *all* of the land, and not just symbolically. (p. 7)

Acknowledgement that Indigenous and settler peoples have differing understandings of land and relation to it could potentially lead to more appropriate approaches for

addressing the tensions at the root of settler colonialism: the violent and non-violent acquisition of land (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Veracini, 2010; Wolfe, 2006). However, the more difficult challenge is how to proceed once there is agreement that settlers appropriated land from Indigenous peoples, through violence, and settlers continue to benefit from this appropriation today.

Summary of Resurgence and Restitution

In summary, using the word reconciliation to describe other aligned efforts complicates how reconciliation is understood in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous contexts. Tuck and Yang (2012) criticize reconciliation stating that “the desire to reconcile is just as relentless as the desire to disappear the Native; it is a desire to not have to deal with this (Indian) problem anymore” (p. 9). In contrast, the TRC (2015c) believes that reconciliation is necessary and requires “awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour” (p. 3). Across the participants’ discussions of reconciliation in their personal and professional lives, as educators, and including both Indigenous and settler peoples, I have concluded that reconciliation is complicated, ambiguous, and does not, and should not, have one fixed definition. Further, it is important not to collapse other Indigenous-centred efforts into reconciliation.

Conclusion: Unsettling Reconciliation

This discussion chapter has shared three elements associated with the challenges to defining and actualizing reconciliation. First, the systemic manifestations of colonialism including Canada’s long history of oppression, the impacts of the *Indian Act*, and the ways that all of these issues inform the social institutions that exist today

establish a complex web of issues which require attention for improving the relationship between Indigenous and settler societies. This will require education systems to evolve to include Indigenous content – but efforts cannot stop at awareness building. Second, reconciliation requires consideration of the ways that individuals act to maintain these systems. As Regan (2010) states:

When the focus is on colonizers as individual perpetrators, the number of victims is smaller; when colonizers are understood as collective beneficiaries of a system that created and perpetuates inequities and breaches the human rights of oppressed groups, the number of victims increases exponentially. (p. 36)

I propose that we need to find a balance between understanding individual actions as contributing to the systems which inform and reproduce colonialism, and the power of the systems themselves that have more wide-reaching impacts than person-on-person encounters. Finally, reconciliation, like decolonization, tends to be used synonymously with other concepts including resurgence and restitution. Using reconciliation in this way challenges the powerful potential of these other projects and serves as a reminder that language must be used carefully. Together, these issues complicate how we might define and put into practice an understanding of reconciliation that does not simply benefit colonial society (i.e., government and settlers).

I believe settlers need to unsettle the concept of reconciliation and develop their understanding of what reconciliation means across various contexts. Reconciliation cannot be focused on one concern or time period given the complexity of what it entails and how it is entangled in issues beyond the residential school system. I have come to realize that words matter. Individual actions matter. The systems we contribute to have

impacts beyond our own singular vantage point, and we must ensure that settler participation in efforts of reconciliation do not recentre settler privilege. Furthermore, I believe we need to use specific words – resurgence, restitution, reparation, and reconciliation – in their appropriate contexts. This research has led me to rethink how we use the term reconciliation in Canada and that we need to be careful, opting for more specific language, and remember that there are individual and systemic implications for these choices.

In the concluding chapter of this dissertation, I restate the research questions and summarize the purpose and significance of the study. I also propose recommendations/implications for practice and share limitations of this study. I end with areas for future research and some closing remarks. Finally, the dissertation ends with an epilogue.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

This dissertation focuses on a localized professional learning event inspired by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC). The event was designed and developed for educators and community members in Southern Ontario. Examining the specific event as its case, this research project uncovered how people who are interested in reconciliation understand it as a concept and how they describe implementing reconciliation-based activities in their personal and professional lives. Thus, my inquiry was guided by the following three questions:

1. How do Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators retrospectively understand and make meaning of reconciliation after their involvement with organizing and/or participating in a truth and reconciliation event at a local level?
2. How are Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators using what they learned, from organizing and/or participating in a truth and reconciliation event, in their personal and professional lives?
3. How do I make meaning of reconciliation and what are my roles and responsibilities as a settler Canadian in reconciliatory activities with Indigenous peoples?

The relational conceptual framework I developed for this study consists of interrelated paradigms, theories, and concepts from critical and decolonizing perspectives. I employed narrative inquiry as the overarching methodology and used conversational interviews (Kovach, 2009) with an interview guide (Patton, 2002) to gather participants' perspectives. In total, I interviewed sixteen individuals that consisted of seven organizers (occurring across four interviews and one group interview with three

organizers), four presenters, and five attendees. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, returned to the participants for a member check (Kovach, 2009), and pseudonyms assigned for the purposes of protecting participant anonymity and confidentiality. Following my thematic narrative analysis, I identified two overarching themes that respond to my first two research questions: (a) reconciliation is difficult work, and (b) reconciliation requires action.

The program agenda for the professional learning event included workshops hosted by members of the local community and from national organizations, a keynote speaker, and sessions dedicated to listening to testimony from residential school survivors. I spoke with members of the organizing committee, presenters, and educators who attended the event to gather multiple viewpoints of their understanding and experiences with reconciliation. I also attended the event and my insight served to further contextualize the event in this research study. Some participants self-identified as Indigenous or as having mixed heritage; however, most of the participants identified as non-Indigenous. In examining this specific event, the organizers, presenters, and attendees revealed insights about reconciliation in their personal and professional lives.

While not all formal teachers, I chose to describe the participants as educators given the ways that they support learning in their specific contexts (e.g., community agencies, religious communities, public education organizations, post-secondary institutions, and elementary and secondary schools). The TRC-inspired event described in this study served as the basis for this research, however, the participants occupy a broader social distribution including a residential school survivor, religious community members, community workers/advocates, formal teachers, students, and researchers. Thus, the

perspectives shared by this group represent a larger community of people residing in the settler colonial state of Canada. Furthermore, this research contributes to the academic literature on reconciliation by providing insight into localized events and efforts informed by the TRC.

The participants in this study responded to the research questions by naming the systemic challenges to reconciliation, including Canada's history of colonialism that continues to inform life today for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, the paradox of the *Indian Act*, and the consequences of social institutions being embedded in and reproducing settler colonialism. Among the participants, reconciliation is understood to be multidimensional, difficult to clearly define, and implementation tends to be understood in individualized and localized ways. Furthermore, a general lack of understanding among settlers for how their individual actions contribute to maintaining the larger system of settler colonialism presents a challenge for meaningful change. Finally, slippages in the use of the word reconciliation, such as when it is used in place of concepts like resurgence and reparations, can lead to confusion about what reconciliation involves. Moreover, when settlers avoid naming or supporting these other recovery and restitutive projects, they may contribute to actively maintaining the conditions that uphold settler colonial dominance of the reconciliation agenda. Together, these aspects contribute to an expanding conceptualization of reconciliation, beyond residential schools, and beyond settler expectations for the project of improving relations between Indigenous and settler peoples. In the next section, I outline three recommendations as implications for future practice related to reconciliation-based professional learning. I

then discuss the limitations of the study and implications for future research and I conclude the chapter with some final thoughts.

Recommendations/Implications for Practice

In this section, I share a brief list of recommendations regarding the organization of education-focused reconciliation-based activities. These items are informed by four sources of information: (a) the conversations I had with interview participants, (b) my own experiences as an attendee at the event, (c) my own experiences as a formal teacher and teacher educator, and (c) relevant scholarship. Despite the challenges associated with each, together, these listed recommendations and commentary speak to the need for programming that aims to achieve deeper transformational outcomes.

1. Carefully consider the usefulness and purpose of one-off events, and, in planning and coordinating events, build in opportunities for sustained engagement among stakeholders.

Professional learning events focused on reconciliation should develop programming that offers sustained engagement opportunities such as the following: (a) hosting an event that includes follow-up sessions; (b) connecting attendees to establish professional learning communities (Stoll et al., 2006) and/or communities of practice (Blankenship & Ruona, 2007); or (c) committing to host regular events (e.g., annual conference). These recurring events and activities involving reflection on practice (Schon, 1983) increase participant accountability and provide motivating spaces within which to engage in learning. Participants should be encouraged to make meaning of their ongoing self-directed engagement and consider the implications of contributing to meaningful change in self and society.

Committing to ongoing cross-cultural programming involving self-reflection could increase accountability from organizers and contribute to self-assessed learning that informs short- and long-term goals. In instances where conflicts arise, like that reported by some of the organizing committee members in this study, organizers could be better equipped to engage in decision making that is deliberate, thoughtful, and respectful. Indigenous voices and perspectives should be foregrounded in conflict resolution to avoid reaffirming settler dominance; this requires that non-Indigenous organizers be open to and respectful of Indigenous perspectives and approaches to conflict resolution. Organizers also need to consider issues of feasibility including financial constraints, personal well-being (especially for Indigenous peoples for whom this work is particularly laborious), and the time commitments required to organize and host activities.

2. Offer tiered levels of programming to meet the learning needs of attendees.

With the growing awareness of residential school history, and of Indigenous-settler history broadly, there are discrepancies in the level of understanding among educators and the general public. Briefly touching on this topic, Angie suggested that professional development should be offered through levelled programming to more effectively target the specific needs of attendees (e.g., introductory content, programming that gets deeper into anti-racism and decolonization, and increasing relevant pedagogical knowledge). Thus far, some educators in Ontario have self-selected to attend professional learning events, like the event described in this dissertation, or engage in other professional development opportunities (e.g., additional qualification courses). In other instances, school boards have offered in-house professional development (People for Education, 2016). Given the range of introductory and open-ended training options, a

focus on increasing individual competencies through different levels of training would provide opportunity for short- and long-term personal and professional growth.

3. Centre Indigenous perspectives in programming.

It is vital to centre Indigenous peoples and their perspectives in the development, facilitation, and presentation of reconciliation-based programming, while mitigating against tokenism. Within the philosophy of this approach, organizers will be respectful and inclusive of Indigenous-focused goals, and program design will aim to include a deep commitment to disrupting settler dominated discourses of reconciliation.

Limitations/Considerations

This research study includes a small sample of participants with their perspectives converging around one event. It is important to note the representation of participants with an Indigenous background in this study is held to one organizer, three presenters, and one attendee (i.e., five out of a total of sixteen participants) who either self-identified as Indigenous or who self-identified Indigenous heritage. While a uniform sample between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples offers a balanced perspective of reconciliation from each of those cultural standpoints, each participant offered important insight from their diverse positionalities based on age, class, gender, dis/ability, etcetera.

A second limitation related to the participant group involves those who were interested in participating in the study. Despite extending the recruitment invitation to all members of the organizing committee, presenter, and attendee email listservs, the research participant group consists of a small percentage of those who were present at the event. Also, each of the research participants expressed having some previous knowledge of Indigenous-settler history prior to attending the event. Therefore, this research study

represents the views of those who are motivated to learn and already invested in reconciliation. Put another way, the research study is devoid of perspectives from those for whom the event-content is new.

Next, given the length of time since the event took place, I encountered many instances in the interviews where participants could not clearly remember event details. Consequently, the event served minimally as a topic of conversation in most of the interviews, especially with presenters and attendees. The organizers' ongoing commitment and substantial involvement in the event may have played a role in attending more to the topic than others (i.e., their planning, implementing, and debriefing afterwards). Therefore, the participants' perspectives about reconciliation within and beyond the context of the event were not consistently distributed across the three groups I interviewed. Some of the themes in chapter five reflect only the conversations I had with organizers, and others include organizers, and/or presenters, and/or attendees. Confronting this challenge in the interviews, I did my best to provide various types of questions (i.e., background/demographic, knowledge, opinion and value, and feeling questions; Patton, 2002) and the order in which I asked questions also offered ample opportunity for remembering and sharing about experiences. As an attendee at the event, I also have my own understandings of what took place which supported my participation in the conversational interviews.

A final limitation of this study is related to the ways that I conceptualized theories, concepts, and experiences to the exclusion of other perspectives. Furthermore, I am cognizant that the research questions I asked and the specific interview questions I posed might have led participants to speak about reconciliation in a particular way.

Despite asking about the TRC toward the end of the interviews, its notoriety in public discourses weighed heavily on the direction of the interviews.

Implications for Future Research

For some, the TRC represents a “momentous” juncture for reconciliation in Canada (Chung, 2016; Diano, 2015; Leahy, 2015). However, since the release of the TRC’s final report and Calls to Action, there is varied engagement with reconciliation across the country (CBC, 2020). Moving forward, I recommend investigating other localized reconciliation-based events with consideration of community-situated circumstances (e.g., Indigenous communities in the area, localized impacts of residential schools, and the role of relevant education curriculum or policy). With the power of the TRC to interrupt some Canadians’ understanding of Indigenous-settler history, it is imperative that research follow up on the outcomes of the TRC’s efforts. Therefore, examining how other grassroots and institutional collectives understand and activate reconciliation would be a valuable exercise to build understanding about the practical outcomes of the TRC at a localized level.

Furthermore, the investigation of localized events should be analyzed across cases, ideally, comparing events with similarities (e.g., others in Ontario, related to teacher practice, and/or with residential school survivor testimony). In doing so, research activities would identify common learning goals, strategies, and resources used in these (professional learning) events. Moreover, this research is not limited to Ontario as reconciliation-based activities have taken place across the country. For example, the

Blanket Exercise from KAIROS Canada²⁵ and workshops from Reconciliation Canada²⁶ represent national programs which offer programming in local communities.

Research activities examining reconciliation-inspired events should seek to speak with participants before and after the event(s). Follow up with attendees would provide more information about the outcomes of awareness-building events including insight into the ways that these events are addressing the needs of the attendees and if the outcomes align with the goals of the organizers. An action research approach to program evaluation (Patton, 2002) might provide a useful framework to start.

Finally, because this research project incorporated primarily non-Indigenous participants, future research should exclusively invite Indigenous peoples to share their conceptualizations of reconciliation. A project such as this might be situated within the professional learning context, but also extends into efforts beyond education. Missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirited peoples; land claims/restitution (e.g., Wet'suwet'en); implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; and many more, are all viable research settings that necessitate further exploration.

Almost Final Words

The findings I uncovered in this study indicate that there is no consensus on a unifying definition of reconciliation and action for reconciliation is multifaceted. It is also

²⁵ The KAIROS Blanket Exercise is “a unique, participatory history lesson – developed in collaboration with Indigenous Elders, knowledge keepers and educators – that fosters truth, understanding, respect and reconciliation among Indigenous and non-indigenous peoples” (KAIROS Canada, 2019).

²⁶ Reconciliation Canada (no date) is an Indigenous led organization that provides programs and workshops as well as resource sharing to promote reconciliation in Canada.

important to consider how concepts such as resurgence and restitution fold into discussions of reconciliation, or how they should remain separate from it. Therefore, I propose it is more valuable to unsettle the concept of reconciliation while considering it within context-specific frameworks given its complexity and affiliation with issues beyond the residential school system.

As a Euro-Canadian settler invested in learning more about what this identity means, and how to disrupt the systems which provide me with unearned privileges, I have turned to the field of education. My formal education in the K-12 setting offered very little in the way of Indigenous education. It was not until university that my perspectives about what it means to be Canadian began to transform. It is my hope that through my research and teaching I can facilitate an understanding among others so that we can actuate real change with Indigenous peoples on a broader scale.

According to the TRC (2015c), reconciliation is “an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships” (p. 11) and “there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour” (p. 3). Participants similarly looked to education as a site from which to approach reconciliation. For organizers, this was achieved by offering a professional learning event. For the teachers who participated in this research, they were already integrating this content in their practice. As a teacher, I too consider the formal education system to be a vital part of working toward respectful relationships among Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, while acknowledging and challenging its many limitations. Therefore, it should be no surprise that the interview findings point to education as one of the ways in which to support reconciliation. Despite

the perspectives presented in this dissertation about the importance of education, my analysis offers some nuancing of this approach. I firmly assert that any education or awareness building about “Indigenous issues” must avoid re-centring settler privilege and embrace a critical approach that connects history to contemporary experiences. Finally, I believe the query, “what will reconciliation look like?” is less important than the journey. Senator Sinclair has stated: “you don’t have to believe that reconciliation will happen; you have to believe that reconciliation must happen” (Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, 2018, no page).

In the epilogue, I explore what I have learned personally about reconciliation through the research journey documented in this dissertation. As Lincoln and Denzin (2008) write, an epilogue can serve “as a punctuation mark, a semi-colon to a thought or thoughts unfinished” (p. 563). My thoughts and reflections on this doctoral journey will never conclude, nor my thoughts about reconciliation and how I relate to Indigenous peoples as a settler.

Epilogue

I have undergone a substantial personal transformation as a student, researcher, and settler Canadian over my lifetime, and I know the learning gleaned from this research project will continue to influence my life going forward. Like Wilson (2008) states, “*if research doesn’t change you as a person, then you haven’t done it right*” (p. 135, emphasis in original). At the time of completing this dissertation, I feel it necessary to briefly discuss one of the research questions I developed at the beginning of this research process (i.e., How do I make meaning of reconciliation and what are my roles and responsibilities as a settler Canadian in reconciliatory activities with Indigenous peoples?). While this question ebbed and flowed from the periphery of my thinking throughout my doctoral journey, I did not systematically apply methods as I initially planned. Like my presumption that reconciliation could be specifically defined in a research study, this process has been far more complicated than I expected.

I am still, and will always be, a settler. This assertion compels me to continue re/considering my positionality in Canada, as a student and educator, researcher, citizen, and now as a mother. I have had the good fortune of teaching the required Indigenous content course in Western University’s Bachelor of Education program (BEd) for the last several years. This is important to me as I was enrolled in a similar course in Lakehead University’s BEd program many years ago when they were the only university in Ontario to require such a course for pre-service teachers. This course is what prompted me to pursue Indigenous-focused education. Today, as an instructor, I share with my students my growth over the last decade. I share with them my new learning, the questions I continue to have, and areas I need to grow in. In my work as a teacher-educator, I assist

my non-Indigenous students, who make up almost one hundred percent of my student demographic, to learn the often-hidden realities of Canada. I do not believe it should be the responsibility of First Nations, Métis, or Inuit peoples alone to do this work. As a mother, I hope my children will never need to take a course like this. As Ethan stated in our interview:

To reconcile is to come through that unlearning process. But it isn't my first default position. Whether I like it or not, my default position is always going to be to what I originally believed. Then I can go: No. No. Wait a minute, and I move to the second default which is my new perspective. So it's always a second status. Your children won't have an initial default of prejudice. Their absolute default position will be equality. That's reconciliation seen through.

I understand I have a responsibility to personal and professional action so that I can enact change for future generations.

Committing to a cursory process of self-reflexivity, which I understand will continue beyond this dissertation research, I reviewed the eighteen reflective notes I recorded throughout the interview and transcription processes and further reflected on what I have documented in this dissertation. Following this, I have come to some conclusions that I acknowledge are not stable and they will change as I learn and grow in my understanding of what reconciliation means and how I participate in reconciliation. Therefore, I am committed to listing relevant reflective learning statements here, which I will use as a foundation for guided reflection in the future. Firstly, I have learned that reconciliation is uncomfortable for settlers – and it should be – but this discomfort should not be our focus. The research participants, specifically organizers, discussed their

personal discomfort while organizing the event, and in my journals, I noted discomfort in the research process. This included tasks such as the tedious work of transcribing interviews, but also in listening to some participants, who at times, expressed perspectives that I found troubling. This provides learning for me as a researcher (e.g., how to negotiate the interview process when participants become upset/angry, or express racist remarks), but it also reminds me of the privileges I have as a settler. As a researcher, I get to investigate topics I find interesting and I can choose to engage with or ignore material I find uncomfortable. For example, in a journal entry reflecting on a particularly uncomfortable interview, I questioned how I should transcribe some of the racist language that the participant expressed. At the time of the interview and of writing the journal entry, I did not realize the power I had over the situation (i.e., to intervene in the interview, decide if and how the racist remarks should be included, etcetera). This continues to trouble me and is something I reflect on in my daily life, such as when and how I should intervene in instances of discrimination I observe in my community.

Furthermore, I have learned that despite public discourses, reconciliation requires more than understanding the residential school era, and having knowledge of history is not reconciliation. In reflecting on my interviews with several of the participants, some of which was documented in the reflective journals, I did weave this point into a number of the conversations. Both then and now I realize that acknowledging the implications of the residential school era, or even the policies which supported the rise of the residential school system, will not be enough. Information sharing is not enough and my commitment to reconciliation needs to move beyond awareness-building. I understand that the TRC's Calls to Action are one site from which non-Indigenous Canadians can

begin to make substantive change. While many of the Calls are directed at various levels of government, it is individuals who are responsible for enacting this change. In the community where I grew up, a grassroots group called the Maamawi Collective²⁷ has come together following inspiration from Call to Action 53, part 4 which calls for public dialogue around reconciliation.²⁸ As part of our initial first steps, we have advocated to our Town Council on a number of matters and are working to promote awareness in our community. We continue to seek other ways to act against the oppression of Indigenous peoples.

Like I have heard in many of my parenting circles, “know better, do better.” This premise has led me to the question, what will every single person who learns about the history, and present, of Canada do with that knowledge? What do I do with the knowledge I gained in my formal schooling and from learning in Indigenous communities? I believe it is the actions we take, both small and large, with the awareness we have gained, that can lead us toward the possibility of reconciliation; however, I am aware that reconciliation, the conciliated relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, will never likely be possible. As many of the participants suggested, efforts that work towards reconciliation require action in both one’s personal and professional life. From this research, I have learned that who I am in my personal life bleeds into my professional/academic work. Therefore, every day, throughout my day, I am committed to disrupting the systems that uphold settler colonial dominance. I

²⁷ In Anishinaabemowin this translates to bringing together.

²⁸ While related to the TRC’s Call for the establishment of the National Council of Reconciliation, the Maamawi Collective has been inspired to promote public dialogue and education about issues of reconciliation.

consider whose writing I read and cite, in which I focus on Indigenous-authored news sources and scholarly writing. I try to be conscious of where I spend my money, in which I make efforts to support Indigenous businesses, or businesses that ethically/locally source materials. Further, I use the discussions I have with my family and peers to disrupt racist beliefs or raise awareness about systemic barriers for marginalized peoples. Finally, I continue to learn more about my privilege and the ways in which I can use it to challenge oppression.

Then there is the question, who is reconciliation for? Is it Indigenous peoples who need to reconcile with the nation-state that has been established on their homelands? I find this unlikely. Instead, I believe it is non-Indigenous Canadians who need to facilitate a space of reconciliation, where we begin by interrogating our identities and privilege that will then allow us to develop a more informed position from which to begin to act. Non-Indigenous peoples first need to respect the fact, and not deny, that their government committed/commits acts of genocide, and we continue to benefit from the systems of oppression that exist in Canada today. Therefore, reconciliation becomes the responsibility of settlers, leaving Indigenous peoples to determine their own path forward. This is where I believe the work of reconciliation needs to take place.

For now, I continue to shift the ways I think about my position as a settler in Canada. I also aim to support other non-Indigenous peoples, through my teaching, research, and everyday interactions so that they consider their position as settlers on Indigenous homelands. I will raise my children with an understanding that they are treaty people, who benefit from colonialism by the sheer fact that they were born in Canada. While I am reticent that one day Canadians and Indigenous peoples will be reconciled, I

believe that the work which might get us to a place of reconciliation is worth doing, and there is much work to do.

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Appendices

Appendix A: WNMREB Approval



Western Research

Research Ethics

Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board
NMREB Delegated Initial Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Dr. Brent Debassige
Department & Institution: Education\Faculty of Education, Western University

NMREB File Number: 108877
Study Title: A Case Study of Indigenous and non-Indigenous participation in a Truth and Reconciliation Event: Implications for Relationship Building

NMREB Initial Approval Date: March 08, 2017
NMREB Expiry Date: March 08, 2018

Documents Approved and/or Received for Information:

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Instruments	Appendix A. interview guide for organizing committee - Received December 20, 2016	
Instruments	Appendix C interview guide presenters - Received December 20, 2016	
Instruments	Appendix B interview guide for attendees - Received December 20, 2016	
Western University Protocol		2017/02/09
Recruitment Items		2017/02/09
Recruitment Items	New follow up recruitment reminder.	2017/02/09
Letter of Information & Consent		2017/02/09

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the above named study, as of the NMREB Initial Approval Date noted above.

NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the NMREB Expiry Date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario.

Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB.

The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.



**Western
Research**

Research Ethics

**Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board
NMREB Amendment Approval Notice**

Principal Investigator: Dr. Brent Debassige

Department & Institution: Education\Faculty of Education, Western University

NMREB File Number: 108877

Study Title: A Case Study of Indigenous and non-Indigenous participation in a Truth and Reconciliation Event: Implications for Relationship Building

NMREB Revision Approval Date: May 15, 2017

NMREB Expiry Date: March 08, 2018

Documents Approved and/or Received for Information:

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Revised Western University Protocol		2017/04/19
Revised Letter of Information & Consent	Focus Group	2017/04/19

The Western University Non-Medical Science Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the amendment to the above named study, as of the NMREB Amendment Approval Date noted above.

NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the NMREB Expiry Date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario.

Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB.

The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Ethics
EO: F

Appendix B: Letter of Information and Informed Consent form

LETTER OF INFORMATION (insert organizer/presenter/attendee) – interviews

A Case Study of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Participation in a Truth and Reconciliation Event: Implications for Relationship Building

Invitation to Participate

Hello. My name is Kaitlyn Watson and I am a doctoral student in the Faculty of Education at Western University. I am conducting a research study that involves investigating people's perspectives and involvement in reconciliation initiatives following their participation in the (insert title of event here). Since you were a (insert organizer/presenter/attendee) at the event, I would like to invite you to participate in this study.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is to better understand how Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators understand and make meaning of reconciliation after participating in the (insert title of event here). In addition, this research study will explore how you have used what was learned from the event in your personal and professional life. Broadly, I hope this information will lead to understanding ways in which to practice positive relationship-building between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and contribute to a response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls to action.

If you agree to participate

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to share your perspectives and experiences on the topic of reconciliation during an interview that will last about one to two hours in total. I also will ask for your permission to digitally record our conversation so that it can be transcribed into text. If you do not agree to digital recording, you may still participate in the study although no quotes will be collected in notes taken during the interview. For those who agree to be recorded, an electronic copy of the text will be made available to you in a secure online platform so that you can review it for accuracy. Alternatively, at your request, a physical copy can be sent to you by registered mail and will include a self-addressed prepaid registered mail envelope for return of the physical copy. I anticipate that the follow-up review will take about thirty minutes to complete. Please note that any ideas or comments that you share may be included in my dissertation and may be published in academic journals and presented at workshops or academic conferences, but direct quotations will only be used with participants' explicit consent.

Confidentiality

The information collected will be used for research purposes only, and neither your name nor information which could identify you will be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. While every effort will be made to protect your information, there is no guarantee that we will be able to do so. The inclusion of your involvement as an

(organizer/presenter/attendee) may allow someone to link the data and identify you. The researcher will keep any personal information about you in a secure and confidential location for five years. A list linking your pseudonym with your name will be kept by the researchers in a secure place, separate from your study file. Lastly, representatives of The University of Western Ontario Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

Risks and Potential Benefits

While the researcher will take every precaution to mitigate risk, given the focus of the topic covered at the (insert title of event here), there is the possibility of having an emotional reaction to questions or conversations during the interview. If you would like to speak to someone about anything discussed during the interview, please contact the following agencies:

- Western University faculty and staff can access 24-hour support from FSEAP [REDACTED]
- London and surrounding area residents can access 24-hour support from the London Crisis Response Line [REDACTED]
- Residential school survivors can access 24-hour support from the National Indian Residential School Crisis Line [REDACTED]
- Teachers and others can access 24-hour support from Health Canada's help line [REDACTED]
- Post-secondary students can access 24-hour support from Good2Talk [REDACTED]

The possible benefits to you may include sharing your perspective on decolonizing practices for reconciliatory educational initiatives between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and contributing to the collective story of reconciliation in Canada.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer individual questions or withdraw from the study at any time. If you decide to withdraw from the study, you have the right to request withdrawal of information collected about you. If you wish to have your information removed, please let the student researcher know. If you choose not to participate or to leave the study at any time it will have no effect on your employment status or academic standing.

Compensation

There is no compensation for participation in this research, however, those who choose to meet for an interview at Western University will be eligible for reimbursement of parking (approximately \$3.00).

Contacts for Further Information

If you require any further information regarding this research project or your participation in the study you may contact Kaitlyn (principal contact) or Brent at the following:

Doctoral Student Researcher
(principal contact)

Kaitlyn Watson

Faculty of Education, Western University

[REDACTED]

Principal Investigator
(doctoral supervisor)

Dr. Brent Debassige

Faculty of Education, Western University

[REDACTED]

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Research Ethics [REDACTED], email:

[REDACTED].

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

CONSENT FORM (ORGANIZER/PRESENTER/ATTENDEE)

A Case Study of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Participation in a Truth and Reconciliation Event: Implications for Relationship Building

Principal Investigator: Dr. Brent Debassige
Faculty of Education, Western University



Student Researcher: Kaitlyn Watson
Faculty of Education, Western University



I have read the Letter of Information, I have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate in this research study. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I do not waive any legal right by signing this consent form.

I agree to be audio-recorded in this research

☐ YES ☐ NO

I consent to the use of unidentified quotes obtained during the study in the dissemination of this research

☐ YES ☐ NO

Participant's Name (please print):

Participant's Signature:

Date:

Person Obtaining Informed Consent (please print):

Signature:

Date:

Appendix C: Interview Themes

Interview Themes

Organizers

- Generally speaking, what can you tell me about your experience with the It Matters To Us! conference?
- Initial involvement
- About the committee
- Impacts of being on the committee
- Impacts of the event (personal and professional) for attending
- Reconciliation
- Relationship between the event and reconciliation
- Action since the event
- Allyship or other

Presenters

- Context (Generally speaking, what can you tell me about your interaction with the It Matters To Us! conference?)
- Impacts of the event (personal and professional) *presenting and attending
- Reconciliation
- Allyship or other

Attendees

- Context (Generally speaking, what can you tell me about your interaction with the It Matters To Us! conference?)
- Impacts of the event (personal and professional)
- Reconciliation
- Allyship or other

Appendix D: Letter of Information and Informed Consent form

LETTER OF INFORMATION (insert organizer/presenter/attendee) – focus group

A Case Study of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Participation in a Truth and Reconciliation Event: Implications for Relationship Building

Invitation to Participate

Hello. My name is Kaitlyn Watson and I am a doctoral student in the Faculty of Education at Western University. I am conducting a research study that involves investigating people's perspectives and involvement in reconciliation initiatives following their participation in the (insert title of event here). Since you were a (insert organizer/presenter/attendee) at the event, I would like to invite you to participate in this study.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is to better understand how Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators understand and make meaning of reconciliation after participating in the (insert title of event here). In addition, this research study will explore how you have used what was learned from the event in your personal and professional life. Broadly, I hope this information will lead to understanding ways in which to practice positive relationship-building between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and contribute to a response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls to action.

If you agree to participate

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to share your perspectives and experiences on the topic of reconciliation during a focus group interview with up to three people held in a private setting that will last about two hours in total. I will ask members of the focus group for permission to digitally record our conversation so that it can be transcribed into text. If any focus group participant does not agree to digital recording, the group members may not participate in the study. An electronic copy of the text will be made available to each person in a secure online platform so that it can be reviewed for accuracy. I anticipate that the follow-up review will take about thirty minutes to complete. Please note that any ideas or comments that you share may be included in my dissertation and may be published in academic journals and presented at workshops or academic conferences, but direct quotations will only be used with participants' explicit consent.

Confidentiality

The information collected will be used for research purposes only, and neither your name nor information which could identify you will be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. Please be advised that although the researcher will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data, the nature of the focus group prevents the

researchers from guaranteeing confidentiality. The researcher will remind participants to respect the privacy of your fellow participants and not repeat what is said in the focus group to others. The researcher will keep any personal information about you in a secure and confidential location for five years. A list linking your pseudonym with your name will be kept by the researchers in a secure place, separate from your study file. Lastly, representatives of The University of Western Ontario Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

Risks and Potential Benefits

While the researcher will take every precaution to mitigate risk, given the focus of the topic covered at the (insert title of event here), there is the possibility of having an emotional reaction to questions or conversations during the interview. If you would like to speak to someone about anything discussed during the interview, please contact the following agencies:

- Western University faculty and staff can access 24-hour support from FSEAP [REDACTED]
- London and surrounding area residents can access 24-hour support from the London Crisis Response Line [REDACTED]
- Residential school survivors can access 24-hour support from the National Indian Residential School Crisis Line [REDACTED]
- Teachers and others can access 24-hour support from Health Canada's help line [REDACTED]
- Post-secondary students can access 24-hour support from Good2Talk [REDACTED]

The possible benefits to you may include sharing your perspective on decolonizing practices for reconciliatory educational initiatives between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and contributing to the collective story of reconciliation in Canada.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer individual questions or withdraw from the study at any time. If you decide to withdraw from the study, you have the right to request withdrawal of information collected about you. If you wish to have your information removed, please let the student researcher know. If you choose not to participate or to leave the study at any time it will have no effect on your employment status or academic standing.

Compensation

There is no compensation for participation in this research, however, those who choose to meet for an interview at Western University will be eligible for reimbursement of parking (approximately \$3.00).

Contacts for Further Information

If you require any further information regarding this research project or your participation in the study you may contact Kaitlyn (principal contact) or Brent at the following:

**Doctoral Student Researcher
(principal contact)**

Kaitlyn Watson
Faculty of Education, Western University

[REDACTED]

**Principal Investigator
(doctoral supervisor)**

Dr. Brent Debassige
Faculty of Education, Western University

[REDACTED]

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Research Ethics [REDACTED], email:

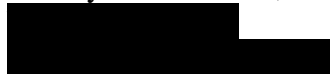
[REDACTED].

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

CONSENT FORM (ORGANIZER/PRESENTER/ATTENDEE)- Focus Group

A Case Study of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Participation in a Truth and Reconciliation Event: Implications for Relationship Building

Principal Investigator: Dr. Brent Debassige
Faculty of Education, Western University



Student Researcher: Kaitlyn Watson
Faculty of Education, Western University



I have read the Letter of Information, I have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate in this research study. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I do not waive any legal right by signing this consent form.

I agree to be audio-recorded in this research

☐ YES ☐ NO

I consent to the use of unidentified quotes obtained during the study in the dissemination of this research

☐ YES ☐ NO

Participant's Name (please print):

Participant's Signature:

Date:

Person Obtaining Informed Consent (please print):

Signature:

Date:

Curriculum Vitae

Kaitlyn Watson, HBASc, BEd, MA

Education

Doctor of Philosophy: Education Studies, field of Critical Policy, Equity, and Leadership Studies
Western University (2014-2020)

Master of Arts: Canadian Studies and Indigenous Studies
Trent University (2012- 2014)

Bachelor of Education: Intermediate/Senior stream, English and Geography
Lakehead University (2011-2012)

Honours Bachelor of Arts and Sciences: Interdisciplinary Studies
Lakehead University (2008-2011)

Relevant Teaching Experience

Secondary Occasional Teacher

York Region District School Board (2017-present)

Instructor in Master of Professional Education: Educational Leadership (Aboriginal Leadership) program

Western University (2019-2020)

- Capstone/Culminating Project (9455B)
- Doing Educational Research (9454A)

Instructor in Master of Professional Education: Equity, Diversity, and Social Justice program

Western University (2019)

- Aboriginal Education: Implications for Social Justice Education (9442L)

Instructor in Bachelor of Education program

Western University (2016-2019)

- Aboriginal Education: Toward a Decolonizing Pedagogy for Teachers (5423S)

Teaching Assistant/Online Coordinator

Western University (2014-2015)

Teaching Assistant

Trent University (2012-2014)

- The History of Indians in Canada (2255Y)
- Canada: The Land (2040Y)

Relevant Research Experience

Research Assistant

Lakehead University (2018-2019)

Research Assistant

Western University (2015-2018)

Selected Peer Reviewed Publications

Lorusso, J.R., **Watson, K.**, Brewer, J., Hubley, M., Lenders, R., & Pickett, M. (2019). Learning to infuse Indigenous content in physical education: A story of growth towards reconciliation. *PHEnex*, 10(2), 1-17

Faubert, B., Ho ai Le, A.T., Wakim, G., Swapp, D., & **Watson, K.** (2019). Calibrating the Evidence-Based Adequacy Model across educational contexts: Policy and leadership as powerful influences. *International Journal of Education Policy and Leadership*, 14(4), 1-19.

Currie-Patterson, N., & **Watson, K.** (2017). A policy, a 'priority', an unfinished project: Reflecting on the "Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework." *Canadian Journal of New Scholars in Education* 8(1), 70-79.

Currie-Patterson, N., & **Watson, K.** (2017). Conceptualizing critical friendship as a protective measure in academia. *Journal of Working-Class Studies* 2(2), 47-61.

Selected Non-Peer Reviewed Publications

Watson, K. (2018-2019). Missing and murdered Indigenous women: The role of grassroots organizations and social media in education. *Canadian Woman Studies*, 33(1-2), 204-210.

Watson, K., & Currie-Patterson, N. (2018). Notes from the Field/Responding to the *Calls to Action*: Reflections on teaching mandatory Indigenous education to teacher candidates in Ontario. *McGill Journal of Education*, 53(2), 362-371.

Watson, K. (2017). Book Review: "Trickster Chases the Tale of Education." *International Indigenous Policy Journal*, 8(4), 1-3.

Conroy, E., Wheatley, K., Harquail, A., **Watson, K.**, & Johnson, B. (2012). *Walking with Miskwaadesi*. Toronto, ON: Gage.

Conroy, E., Wheatley, K., Harquail, A., **Watson, K.**, & Johnson, B. (2012). *Walking with A'now:ara*. Toronto, ON: Gage.

Selected Conference Presentations

Watson, K. (2020, June). *Reconciliation: Challenges and Considerations*. Paper session presentation at the 2020 Canadian Society for the Study of Education Annual Conference at Western University, London, Ontario. *cancelled because of COVID-19

Watson, K. (2019, May). *Awareness, Acknowledgement, Atonement, and Action: How Educators Understand Reconciliation*. Paper session presentation at the 2019 Canadian Society for the Study of Education Annual Conference at University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia.

Watson, K. (2019, April). *Indigenous and non-Indigenous participation in a Local Truth and Reconciliation Event: Implications for Relationship-Building*. Paper session presentation at the 2019 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association in Toronto, Ontario.

Watson, K. (2018, November). *Discourses of Indigenous education in Ontario, Canada: Aims, Responsibilities, and Outcomes*. Paper session presentation at the CSLEE Values and Leadership Conference in Houston, Texas.

Watson, K., & Currie-Patterson, N. (2018, April-May). *Bringing Mandatory Indigenous Education into a Faculty of Education in Ontario: Unsettling, Decolonizing, and Reconciling*. Paper session presentation at the Canadian Symposium on Indigenous Teacher Education: “Bridging Two Worlds” at Nipissing University, North Bay, Ontario.

Watson, K., & Clausen, J. (2017, May). *Mandatory Indigenous Content in Faculties of Education in Ontario: Reflections, Observations, and Suggestions*. Paper session presentation at the Canadian Society for the Study of Education Annual Conference at Ryerson University, Toronto, Ontario.

Watson, K. (2016, October). *The Possibilities of History Education for Reconciling in Canada: An Examination of the Teaching Resource “100 Years of Loss: The Residential School System in Canada.”* Paper session presentation at the Canadian History of Education Association Biennial Conference in Waterloo, Ontario.

Debassige, B. & **Watson, K.** (2016, June). *Extending self-reflexivity and engaging tacit knowledge: An investigation into a decolonizing method for use with non-Indigenous doctoral students*. Paper session presentation at the Canadian Society for the Study of Education Annual Conference at University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta.

Watson, K. (2013, November) *Thomas King's Truth & Bright Water as Counter-Narrative and Teaching Tool*. Paper session presentation at the Two Days of Canada Conference at Brock University, St. Catherines, Ontario.

Professional Development

Reconciliation Through Indigenous Education

EdX & University of British Columbia (2015)

Teaching First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Children AQ

Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (2014)

Integrated Course Design Workshop

Trent University (2013)

Selected Academic Service

Reviewer

Canadian Journal of New Scholars in Education (2017-present)

McGill Journal of Education (2017)

President's Council on Truth and Reconciliation

Lakehead University (2018)

Faculty of Education Appointments Committee

Western University (2016)

Graduate Student Representative

Senate, Senate Executive, Graduate Studies Committee, Eighth Presidential Search Committee

Trent University (2015-2016)

Selected Awards

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)

CGS Doctoral Fellowship

Western University (2017-2020)

Ontario Graduate Scholarship

Western University (2015-2016, 2016-2017)

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)

Joseph-Armand Bombardier CGS Master's Scholarship

Trent University (2012-2013)

Alan Wilson Entrance Scholarship

Trent University (2012-2014)

Professional Membership

- American Educational Researcher's Association
- Canadian Society for Studies in Education
 - Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies
 - Canadian Educational Researchers' Association
 - Canadian Association of Foundations of Education
 - Canadian History of Education Association
 - Canadian Association for Studies in Indigenous Education
 - Canadian Association for Teacher Education
- Consortium for the Study of Leadership and Ethics in Education